

DAY
Seven



Jaden's Story...

When Jaden came into care as a drug addicted newborn, no one at the time knew what the future held for him. He screamed the first three months of his life and did not sleep well until after six months. A case plan for reunification was developed for Sarah, his birth mother. For most of the two years that Jaden was in foster care, his mother worked through her case plan. Although she was slow to start implementing her plan, with the support and encouragement from Jennifer, Jaden's caregiver, and her social worker, Sarah was able to meet her goals. When the reunification timeline was set, Jennifer knew how important this transition for Jaden would be. And so the process began. At first the two families began meeting at a local park. This gave time to slowly transition between homes. Jaden soon began visits to his mother's home and eventually overnights began. It was very important through the whole process to talk to Jaden and explain what was going on. Even though he couldn't verbalize what he was feeling, it was important to reassure him that he would always be safe and loved. When the case plan goals were met, Jaden was reunified with his mother with the security that he needed. Despite his early complications due to drug exposure and also at the age of two having to leave the only home he knew, Jaden rebuilt a strong attachment to his mother and is thriving. Jaden is now six years old and doing wonderfully. He still has visits with Jennifer and feels that she is just another extension of his family.



DAY Seven

DAY Seven of 21st Century Caregiving: Foster VC Kids Resource Family Training focuses on educational needs of children in the foster care system and transitions. We may hear from the Ventura County Office of Education Foster Youth Services Program. They will be talking to us about the educational rights of children in foster care, as well as the critical importance of school stability. During today's session we will also revisit loss and attachment and how transitions impact a child's trauma. We will explore the types of transitions a child might face on his/her personal path to permanency as well as the transitions you and your families will face as a child comes into and out of your home. We will also explore how to help children make good transitions. Additionally, we will revisit the importance of life books and introduce the concept of the eco-maps and life-maps in relationship to transitions.



Today's OBJECTIVES

- 1 Foster Children's educational rights.** Understand the various rights that foster children have to access education.
- 2 Resource family responsibilities related to education.** Identify resource family responsibilities for support their foster child's education and academic achievement.
- 3 The importance of school stability.** Understand the negative outcomes associated with school instability and changes.
- 4 Educational resources.** Identify resources available to you to meet a child's educational needs.
- 5 Emotional support during Transitions.** Identify the feelings a child may experience during these transitions and determine how to help the child manage these feelings in order to achieve successful transition.
- 6 Foster Family Grief and Loss.** Identify the feelings you and your family may experience during transitions of a foster child into and out of your home and determine how you may manage these feelings in order to achieve a successful transition.
- 7 Types of Transitions.** Identify the types of transitions a child in the foster care system may experience on his/her personal journey towards permanency.
- 8 Maintaining connections.** Utilize an eco-map to identify connections and analyze support systems which can help through the transition process.
- 9 Welcoming a child.** Apply what you have learned about the foster care process as you welcome a new child into your home.

EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF *Children in Foster Care*

- ✓ AB 490 legislation allows for foster children to be immediately enrolled in school without records (including birth certificate and immunization records), to be maintained in school placements, to be placed in the least restrictive educational setting possible, and given access to the same academic resources, services, and extracurricular activities. All educational and school placement decisions are to be dictated by the best interest of the child. This legislation allows requires school to provide a liaison to ensure proper placement, transfer and enrollment in school. The law also liberalized the sharing of records to streamline school enrollment and academic achievement.
- ✓ AB 216 allows for school districts to exempt a pupil in foster care from coursework and other requirements adopted by the governing board of the local school district that are in addition to the statewide coursework requirements. This eases the path to graduation for children who have moved schools and have lost opportunities to receive credits.
- ✓ Some children's birth parents will remain the education rights holder, and the foster family will be partnering with them to make educational decisions.



EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES *for Resource Families*

- ✓ To maintain the school of origin whenever possible.
- ✓ Consult with the social worker before making any school changes
- ✓ Partner with educational rights holders, who may be the birth parents, a CASA, or former caregiver, before making any educational decisions including school changes.
- ✓ Work with the team to identify needed services, assessments and interventions in the school setting.
- ✓ Provide transportation to and from school or work with the child's team to transport if needed to retain school of origin.
- ✓ Participate in teacher meetings, IEPs, Back to School Night, teacher conferences, and other school related meetings.
- ✓ Encourage participation in school clubs, sports & other extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Assist with homework and school projects.

RESOURCES ABOUT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Every Time Foster Kids Move, They Lose Months of Academic (2/18/2014)


<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/every-time-foster-kids-move-they-lose-months-of-academic-progress/284134/>

This article in The Atlantic discusses the impact of educational instability on foster youth academic achievement.

Ventura County Office of Education Foster Youth Services Program

<http://www.vcoe.org/spes/FosterYouthServices.aspx>

Handouts including: School Liaisons 2014-15, Uninterrupted Scholars Act FAQs, AB 490 Fact Sheet, AB 216 Fact Sheet, AB 12 Fact Sheet, Info about Foster Ed Connect & Children's Law Center of California, Free Tutoring Referral, The Invisible Achievement Gap Report and brochures that review foster children's education rights and service available.



**Did
you
know?**

Keeping Youth in Their Schools Matters!

- By the time they age out of the system, over one third will have experienced five or more school moves.
- Children are estimated to lose four to six months of academic progress per move, which puts most foster care children years behind their peers.
- School transfers also decrease the chances a foster care student will ever graduate from high school.
- A national study of 1,087 foster care alumni found that “youth who had even one fewer change in living arrangement per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school before leaving foster care.
- Some other startling stats include: 50% of adolescents aging out of foster care and juvenile justice systems will be homeless within 6 months because they are unprepared to live independently, have limited education, and no social support.
- Only 54% of aged-out foster kids receive their diploma.
- Over 50% of aged out foster youth are unemployed. Compare this to the 14.2% of general youth age 14-24.

Educational Resources

- 504 Plans
- Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) & Special Education Programs
- Early Start Services
- Low-cost and free online tutoring and career guidance through www.iFoster.org
- Advocacy and support through the Foster Youth Services Program at VCOE. If ever in doubt, consult FYS for support!
- Each school district is required to have a Foster Youth Services liaison available to assist you in school related issues for your child. Visit the Ventura County Office of Education Foster Youth Services website for an updated list of liaisons.

Trauma & TRANSITION



Trauma can have profound effects on a child's healthy physical and psychological development. Children who have survived trauma often find it difficult to:

- Trust other people.
- Feel safe.
- Understand and manage their emotions.
- Adjust and respond to life's changes.
- Physically and emotionally adapt to stress.

To Attach Means...

Take *Risks*

Allow themselves to *depend on someone else*

Build a *safe zone*

Repeated traumatic experiences particularly in very young children and especially those at the hands of caregivers—can actually alter crucial pathways in the developing brain. Over time, a child who has felt overwhelmed over and over again may not react normally to even minor everyday stresses.

As a Resource family, you can help each child to hold on to what was good about their connections, reshape them, make new meaning from them, and build new, healthier relationships.

Foster Care Attachment

As the primary caregiver, you will be required to be the primary attachment figure for the child. This supports his/her healthy development and his/her future mental health and attachments.

"When your son cries, I am there to meet his needs. If he is hungry I have the bottle, when he is cold I have the blanket and the arms to provide a loving cradle. If your precious son feels that he is safe in this world and his needs are met he can then securely attach and trust. If your infant son can attach to me, he can then securely attach to you when you are ready. Take some comfort in knowing that your son is being loved and well cared for and he is attached..."

...As a Resource family we must constantly be preparing ourselves for children to return to their parents. It's not easy to love a child and let them go but that's what I have been called to do. The children are innocent and need me to be able to love them and release them as happy and healthy as I can. I will then grieve and cry a tear for every child I have cared for."

Kimberly, Caregiver

Role of the Resource family in Transition

"Light their way when the darkness surrounds them. Give them love, let it shine all around them."

— Richard and Karen Carpenter

Love and Safety

Provide a loving and safe home where the child feels connected and wanted.

Connections

Support the child's connections and relationships.

Preparing for the Future. Help the child prepare for the future through support and encouragement of child's interests, education and cultural background.

Trauma-Sensitive Care.

Be a sensitive and responsive caregiver who develops a nurturing relationship with the child that helps the child heal. Respond to child behaviors with trauma-sensitive care while maintaining your own platform.

Skill Building. Help the child develop his/her own strategies for resilience as well as building skills in self-regulation, self-control, social interaction, and cognition.



"To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness."

— Erich Fromm
German-American Social Psychologist

A Child's Losses

Loss is frightening for anyone, but for a child who has experienced trauma, each loss is a reminder of the first losses. Transitions are times of great stress, dysregulation, regression, and acting out.

Helping A Child With Losses

As a trauma-sensitive and attuned parent, you will be aware of your child's triggers and will be able to help your child through his/her reaction to the stress of this loss.

To Have Losses Means...

Loss of *control*

Loss of the *familiar*

Traumatic loss, even if there is also *relief*

CREATING A *Good Transition*

Characteristic of a good transition...



Talking.

Talk to children honestly about the changes that occur with transition and engage children in the process.



Understanding Life History.

Help children review and understand their previous life experiences to help them achieve a greater self-understanding.



Adjusting To Losses.

Help children integrate their previous important attachments to be able to form new attachments.

Talking to the Child About Changes

Questions about the birth family and status may need to be addressed.

It is important to always tell the truth—even if it is painful—and to validate the child's experience and feelings. While these talks may bring up painful feelings for children, and for parents who love them, helping children to grieve can also help them to move on to a feeling of permanency with their new family.

Talks between parents and children about the changes that will occur with transition will probably need to be **repeated several times and in a variety of ways**, so children can fully understand at their own level.

It is best if these conversations take place when the parent and child are **engaged in activities together**.

Four ways to make the Conversation Beneficial for the Child

- 1 Plan the discussion with Social worker in advance.
- 2 Help the child talk about the perceived difference in his/her own words.
- 3 Help the child draw analogies to something in his/her own life.
- 4 Manage your own losses to take pressure off children

Skills to use...

- ✓ Engaging the child
- ✓ Listening to the child
- ✓ Telling the truth
- ✓ Validating the child's life story
- ✓ Creating a safe space for the child
- ✓ Realizing that it is never too late to go back in time
- ✓ Embracing pain as part of the process

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN HISTORY

Resource Families can help children in answering important questions about their lives to assess their readiness for and to prepare them for transition. These questions include:

Who am I? (question related to identity)

What happened to me? (question related to loss)

Where am I going? (question related to attachment)

How will I get there? (question related to relationships)

When will I know I belong? (question related to claiming & safety)

When will I go home? (question related to grief & loss)

Children's answers to these questions will change, depending on their developmental stage. Their responses can guide parents and therapists in helping the children achieve feelings of permanency.

LIFEBOOK: An account of the child's life in words, pictures, photographs, and documents. While lifebooks can take many forms, each child's lifebook will be unique to that child. Resource families can assist in creating a lifebook for a child by gathering information about a child and taking pictures of people and places that are—or were—important to the child.

ECO-MAP: Visual representation of a person and the important people and activities in his or her life. A child's ecomap may have a circle in the middle of the page with a stick figure of a child, along with the question "Why am I here?" Lines are drawn out from the circle like spokes to other circles representing the court, other resource families, siblings, school, or to other topics such as "things I like to do" to visually represent what and who is important to a child and to help the child understand how he or she came to live with the foster family. We will be doing an eco-map in an upcoming activity.

LIFE-MAPS/LIFE-PATHS: Visual representations to help children understand the paths their lives have taken and the decision points along the way. They may have stepping stones to represent a child's age and a statement about where and with whom they lived at that age. They may have lines that go to a drawing of a house representing any foster homes a child lived in, the years the child lived there, and a mention of who lived with the child at that house, if known.

Steps In The Integration Process

STEP 1:

Creating an accurate reconstruction of the child's entire placement history. Creating a lifebook, life-map, or eco-map with a child helps a child to see and understand his or her own history.

STEP 2:

Identifying the important attachment figures in the child's life. Resource families might be able to learn who these important people in a child's life are by listening to the child talk about people from previous placements. These attachment figures might be parents, but they could be siblings, former Resource families, or other family members.

STEP 3:

Gaining the cooperation of the most significant of the attachment figures available. If possible, Resource families should during a child's visits.

STEP 4:

Clarifying the permission message. It is important for children to hear and feel from people who are important to them that it is all right to love another family. The important person in a child's life who is available to give the child that message should be sought out to do so.

STEP 5:

Communicating it to the child. Whether the "permission to love your family" comes in the form of a letter or phone call from grandma or from the Biological Parent during family visits, it is important that children hear from that person that it is not their fault they are in foster care and that it is all right to love another family. This "permission" will go a long way to helping a child relax and build his/her attachment to the new family.



REUNIFICATION & CONCURRENT GOALS TOWARDS PERMANENCY

REUNIFICATION. The case plan has worked and the child is transitioning home.

RELATIVE PLACEMENT. A relative has motioned to gain custody of the child.

INDEPENDENT LIVING. The child has aged out of the system and lives on his/her own.

TRANSITION BACK TO *Biological Parent(s)*

This is an exciting time for the child, the Biological Parent, the Resource family and the whole team. The plan has worked. The Biological Parent(s) have made the necessary or required changes and the child is returning home.

Possible TENSIONS OR ANXIETIES

- Children may wonder if the parent has really changed or if change will last.
- Children may regress in placement due to anxiety.
- Children may want to reject foster family first to show loyalty to family or to avoid their feelings.
- Emotions may run high when reunification is planned and is not immediate.

HOW A *Resource family* CAN HELP THROUGH CO-PARENTING

One of the critical keys to making this transition easier for all involved is consistent and effective co-parenting. Co-parenting encourages a child maintain attachments to more than one person thus reducing the his/her sense of guilt and disloyalty. When the time for transition back to the birth family is at hand, the open communication, mutual respect and teamwork that is created through effective co-parenting should help put the child's mind at ease. Additionally, a child will feel the loss of his/her foster family, so keeping a positive relationship with the Biological Parents will help the child feel as if he/she can maintain a connection with the foster family after returning home thus reducing the impact of this loss.



TRANSITION TO *Relative Placement*

Sometimes relatives will come forward during the placement experience. Relatives and parents who are non-offending may motion for and gain custody even while the previously custodial parent is still working a case plan. Additionally, with the emphasis on family finding, we find that there may be relatives, often paternal relatives, who do not know the child but upon learning of her/him, seek custody.

Possible TENSIONS OR ANXIETIES:

- The child may not know the relative very well.
- Resource families must work with a new partner on the team.
- The transition may happen suddenly and without warning.

HOW A *Resource family* CAN HELP

It is best to plan for this outcome in advance by keeping all records up-to-date and keeping updated journals and notes describing the child's habits and interests. Also, make sure the child has personal items of importance before leaving your home. If at all possible, involve the relative in the child's life before this transition occurs. Your team can help you facilitate this through a family team meeting and can provide ideas for how you can remain connected to the child following transition.



TRANSITION TO *Independent Living*

When a youth turns 18, he/she is officially an adult, and as such, will be able to leave the child welfare system (although a case can stay open until he/she is 21 if requests are made), but supports are in place to help the youth make a successful transition.

HOW A *Resource family* CAN HELP

Just as you would send your own child off to college as prepared as possible, your job is to help the foster youth prepare for the transition to independence. Some of the things you can do include:

- Supporting the youth in developing skills in self-sufficiency when he/she is still living with you.
- Helping the youth gather his/her important documents and keeping these documents up-to-date. Check out the iFoster.org transition age youth digital locker for a way to help your youth store important documents!
- Helping the youth gather important information and providing support/guidance.
- Continuing to be a support and a connection after the child has left your home.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

- A higher risk for unemployment.
- Poor educational outcomes.
- Health issues.
- Early parenthood.
- Long-term dependency on public assistance.
- Increased rates of incarceration.
- Homelessness
- Depression and emotional instability



PLACEMENT *Disruptions*

Disruption due to new placement

Disruptions can happen when a resource family has discovered a deal breaker that they did not know existed or they feel they do not have the skills to care for a child's emotional or physical needs. It is ideal for a child to remain in the same placement until permanency is achieved. We all know that changing foster homes will create another loss and trauma in the child's this decision must be taken seriously with careful thought and planning.

Preventing Disruptions

- Involve the team to help resolve the problem as early as possible.
- Request a team meeting to help stabilize and identify additional supports if needed.
- Seek counseling for the child and/or family.
- Use respite care to give everyone time to reflect and regroup.
- Educate yourself on possible strategies for coping with the possible deal breakers breaking behaviors.
- Join a support group.

When disruptions occur

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, disruption does occur and **there are times that it is best for the child to move to another placement.** Change of placement is advisable when:

- The safety of the family and other children is in jeopardy.
- A reasonable solution cannot be found.
- Medical conditions exist that the family is not skilled to handle.

Always request a team meeting so the move can be planned and to ensure that important information is shared about the child and his/her needs. After making reasonable efforts to save the placement, if disruption does occur, **please do not feel like a failure.** Some children simply need a more specialized care than you may be able to provide. It is important to consider maintaining a relationship with the child even after the move, if it is in his/her best interest.

Helping your family through Transitions

Helping your family through loss

While it is comforting to know that you are doing an extraordinary thing by providing a child the care he/ she needs to heal and to thrive in the future, it takes a lot of courage to be a Resource family. You have nurtured and cared for a child for months or even years. You have become deeply attached to the child and now the child is leaving your home. During this time, as we know, the child will experience grief and loss and you must help the child through this loss. But, you and your family will experience grief and loss as well.

Strategies for letting go

- Keeping a record of the child from the first day including photos, memorabilia (this is good for you too)
- Acknowledging that a child's fear is greater than your own.
- Recognizing you did your best for the child will help you with your own grief.

Preparing for the separation in advance

- Working with the Biological Family as much as you can so you can ALL feel a sense of continuity and connection.
- Reaching out, through visitation, conversations, letters, phone calls and e-mail, to the new family to help the transition and to build connections.
- Reaching out to the team when you and your family members need extra support.
- Sharing your grief appropriately with your partner, the Biological Parent(s), children, and team.



ORGANIZATIONS, WEBSITES, BOOKS, ARTICLES AND MORE...

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

(www.nctsn.org) This network was established to improve access to care, treatment, and services for traumatized children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events.

Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma.

(www.nctsn.org) This workshop for resource parents by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network was the source for much of this day of training.

Attachment 101, A Primer for Parents.

(http://web.multco.us/sites/default/files/dcj/documents/attachment_101_a_primer_for_parents.pdf) This primer by Heidi Holman, an adoptive parent, discusses how attachment relationships impact brain development, the effects of early loss and trauma on development and provides some pointers on how to help a child who has suffered attachment disorders heal.

The Challenges of Foster Care: Grief and Loss.

(<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/Portals/fcarc/Tip%20Sheets/Grief%20and%20Attachment/Grief%20and%20Loss.pdf>) This tip sheet, by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin, provides tips, strategies and resources for coping with the grief and loss experienced by Resource families.

Resource Families Considering Adoption

(http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.pdf)

This factsheet, by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, written for resource families who are considering adopting one or more of the children in their care. While this factsheet does not address the specifics of how to adopt, it provides information on the differences between foster care and adoption, and it explores some of the things for resource families to consider when making the decision about whether to adopt a child in their care.

Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child

(http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.pdf). This factsheet, by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, discusses how foster families who choose to adopt the child or children in their care, can to help these children make the emotional transition from being “a ward of the State or the Court” to being “a son or daughter” of specific parents.

Emotional Regulatory Healing.

(www.coaching-forlife.com). This training material is by Juli Alvarado.



Jessamyn (2 years 4 months)



Birdy (14)

Birdy- Transition to Biological Father

Birdy, her dad, and her team worked hard to help her move into recovery from trauma and struggles with self-harm and depression/anxiety. Her journey to healing inspired her dad, and the two made phenomenal progress in their respective treatments. Six months later, Birdy's dad is living in an apartment, working, and actively participating in aftercare for his rehabilitation program. Birdy has opened up the family and has also been able to have visits with her dad with increasing autonomy. At the permanency hearing, the judge determines that Birdy can slowly begin transitioning back to her home. This move will not be immediate, however. Birdy and her father will have more frequent visits, then will have overnights, and then will be reunified. In response to the news, Birdy returns home and packs. She then shuts out the family emotionally and spends her days waiting to be reunified. She's frustrated that the transition will be slow.

Jessamyn- Transition to Relative Placement

Jessamyn dad's aunt met her at the hospital and has been trying to convince the dad to seek custody or enter a reunification plan. When Jessamyn's dad will not become involved, his aunt Margaret finally goes against her nephew's wishes and petitions for relative caregiver custody. Since she is a nurse and can provide medical care, she is approved. You are ordered to return the child immediately. You and your family are devastated: you were supportive of her mom but thought you would have Jessamyn placed in your home longer. In addition to your deep attachment to Jessamyn, you have recently booked a 7-day cruise, and you purchased a ticket for Jessamyn, having asked for permission from the court for the cruise prior to Margaret's petition. In a family team meeting, the team has agreed to arrange visits between you, Margaret and the baby to maintain your connection to the child and remain a support to Jessamyn's aunt and mother.

Miguel & Marisol- Disruption Due to New Placement

Miguel has continued to struggle with his behavior in school. Most recently, he was accused of initiating sexual activity with another boy in the bathroom and was suspended from school. Upon being suspended, he was returned to the home and had a two hour tantrum, during which he defecated in his clothing and scratched himself and attacked you. You sent your own child to her room (Marisol and Ibiza were in school and day care), and called the Social worker. It was determined that Miguel needed an evaluation and was hospitalized for threats to self and others. The evaluator was concerned about sexually aggressive behavior as well as a strong traumatic response that could be made worse by a family pre-disposition to mental illness. Miguel is in the psychiatric hospital, and may be discharged to a more restrictive, specialized setting. Miguel has now been moved into a therapeutic foster home. The plan will be for Miguel to transition back to you upon completion of the program, but it may be a while. Marisol & Ibiza will continue to stay in your home. Marisol is eager for her brother to return home.



Miguel (6) & Marisol (8)



1

What does Birdy need from you to ensure a smooth and effective transition back to her father?

2

How should you respond to Birdy's rejection of you and your family?

3

How will you manage your own feelings of sadness at her leaving, and anger at her attitude?

4

How will you work with Birdy's father during the transition?



1

What does Jessamyn need from you to ensure a smooth and effective transition to her aunt?

2

What can you offer Margaret to help her with the transition?

3

How do you think you would handle the cruise issue?



Ventura County Children & Family Services



1

What would Miguel need from you during his hospitalization and during transition?

2

What would Marisol need from you during Miguel's hospitalization and transition?

3

How would you talk to Marisol about her losses?

4

How can you work with Miguel during transition?



Back to the
Beginning

Welcoming a New Child in Your Home *Worksheet*

1

Now that you have a picture of the whole process, write a speech for welcoming a child that includes welcoming, values your family holds about how to live together, & rules and directions for the few days.

DAY Seven

Thoughts, Feelings & Actions NOTES

Day Seven
Homework

CONNECTIONS FOR FOSTERING A NEW CHILD IN MY HOME

MY → own
Eco-Map

1

What relationships have sustained you during other times of transition?

2

How can these relationships help you in taking children into your home/family?

3

What new supports and resources might you need, or what existing relationships do you have that could built up for support?

4






How can you integrate the child's eco-system into your family map?

Eco-Map Worksheet

Directions...

An eco-map shows sources for conflict and support, represented by shaped connected by different types of lines. Use the space below to show your connections/support and possible conflicts in fostering a child. Use circles for females and squares for males.

Eco Map Key

-  Important or positive connection
-  Neutral Connection
-  Indicates stress or conflict
-  Indicates a tenuous relationship
-  The direction or flow of resources, energy, or interest

Eco-Map Diagram