

MANAGING THE HURT: WHEN YOUR FOSTER CHILD LEAVES

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Welcome & Introductions

- Name,
- Years in Caregiving,
- How many children have you fostered?
- Icebreaker

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Adoption & Safe Family Act - 1997

1. Development of permanency planning strategies to prevent "foster care drift";
2. Greater provision of services to families working toward reunification;
3. The expedited termination of parental rights;
4. Adoption incentive payments;
5. Implementation of quality assurance standards.

Agencies are required to move quicker to ensure...

- Permanency planning begins at placement;
- Actions to involve parents/or other family members must begin immediately after child enters placement;
- All efforts to engage parents must be concrete and documented; and,
- Parents must be informed at the time of placement of their obligations to their child and be aware of the shortened time frames in which to resolve their issues that necessitated placement.

THE NATURE OF FOSTER CARE

- Expectation
- Investment
- Advocating
- Emotional Support
- Loving them



Foster Parent/Foster Child Attachment

"Attachment refers to close, enduring emotional connections that develop throughout life." Attachment can occur in **multiple relationships** throughout development and can be influenced by multiple factors.

A TOUGH POSITION

- Knowing that the relationship is temporary verses the feeling in your heart, it can be very confusing
- Expectation to disengage in a way that is helpful to the child and everyone involved.
- Everyone focused on the child and the move...what about the feelings of loss experienced by foster parents?
- Understanding feelings of loss and grief...



Ways That Foster Parents Experience Grief and Loss

What are some ways the Caregivers witness loss and feelings of grief?

When Does Grief Start?



Planning & Preparation

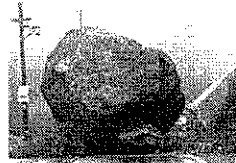


Now What Can We Do?



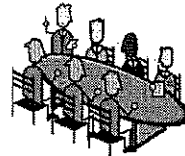
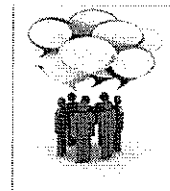
- Develop a positive, nurturing relationship during placement. Help the foster child connect with their birth parents, find ways to form a positive relationship between you and the parents as well as the child and the parents. Active listening...
- Start transitioning when overnight visits start or county decides for reunification or adoption. Pack seasonal clothing and box them, packing some toys.
- Have your birth children involved in the transition by asking them to find a toy that the foster child can take with them on visits so they feel more at home.

Obstacles & Barriers to Grieving



- Grieving is difficult when the relationship to the lost person was ambivalent or hostile.
- Number of demands placed on foster parents.
- Unspoken expectation that foster parents should not get too attached to the children in their homes.
- Differences in personalities... some people have a need to appear confident and independent, can view the vulnerability that is part of grief as a sign of weakness.

Group Discussion Forum



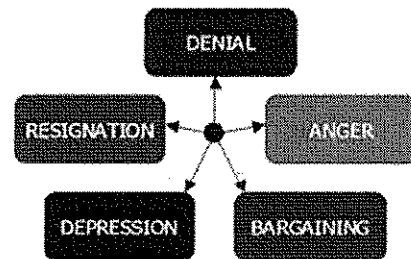
Why Does It Hurt So Much?

- Legality Issues
- Leaving to the unknown
- Expectation of being prepared for this loss
- There is no closure
- Child is not replaceable, not even by taking another child into the home.

Losing Isaiah



Stages of Grief



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The Grieving Process

1. Shock
The initial emotion that one feels is a feeling of shock and total astonishment.
2. Denial
Can not believe what has happened so we go on thinking that nothing has happened.
3. Anger and Guilt
A reaction of anger comes from feelings of unfairness, abandonment, or feeling powerless attached with the loss.

You feel guilt when you feel that you have violated your own standard or feel that you have let others down in some way.

The Grieving Process (Continued)

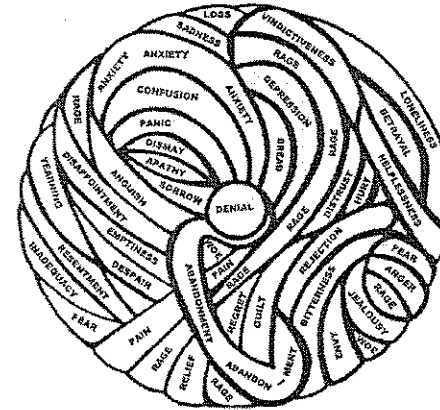
4. Depression

When one begins to feel overwhelmed by what has happened and feel hopeless, this is usually when the depression sets in.

5. Acceptance

For most this is the final stage of the grieving process. We come to terms with the loss, and are ready to move on with our lives.

Ball of Grief



Dealing with Depression

- ✓ Planning activity
- ✓ Having a good listener or counseling (CBT)
- ✓ Time limited use of medication



STAGES OF ADJUSTMENT

- STAGE ONE: Breaking Old Habits
- STAGE TWO: Beginnings of Reconstruction of Life
- STAGE THREE: Seeking New Relationships
- STAGE FOUR: Readjustment Completed

How Can We Handle This Loss?

- Loss is real
- Provide a frame of reference
- Everyone grieves differently
- Have faith
- Foster care is a journey
- Birth order change
- Grief comes in waves
- Memories
- Journal how you feel daily
- Good start
- Temporary relationships are significant

Coping and Healing

- Admitting to themselves and others that their grief is overwhelming, unpredictable, painful, draining, and exhausting—that the situation should not be ignored.
- Allowing yourself to experience the pain of grief and working through it.
- Having someone to share feelings with. Finding a support group.
- Talking about the loss and encouraging others to talk of the child. Accepting the reality of the loss.
- Counting on, confiding in, and trusting those who care.
- Accepting that they are allowed to feel pleasure and continue their lives.

Role of the Agency

- Communication – Social Worker should be direct and honest with foster parents
- Relationship with Social Worker and vulnerability
- Provide education and training related to loss and the grieving process
- Develop a self-help group for foster parents grieving loss of a child

Helping Your Child Grieve

- Be willing to grieve openly in front of your children.
- Each child is different and may respond to the hurt differently.
- Follow your child's lead, do not rush them if they are reserved.
- Experiment with different positive coping strategies with your child and place them where they can see them.
- Put together a scrapbook, memory book that you and your birth children can cherish and remember. (Lifebooks)



Helping Another Grieving Foster Parent

- Acknowledge the love that the foster parent has for this lost child
- Grieve with them, walk along side them in their journey
- Expect the grieve to cycle through all the stages of grief
- Allow the open wound to be exposed...feeling vulnerable
- Encourage the parent to share their feelings in a supportive and loving environment.
- Offer to take the other children for an outing or bring a pot luck dish for the whole family



Celebrations

- Witnessed positive changes taking place in the lives of foster children
- Own birth children have benefited and learned more about loving, sharing and giving
- Helped a family gain time to get back on their feet
- Provided a safe place for children while permanent placement was established
- Made a huge difference in children's lives

CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATION



Thank you for all of your hard work today...and every day on behalf of Ohio's most vulnerable children!



Kathy

