

Unit IV: Convening the Kinship Network

Overview

This unit focuses on building skills in convening key members of the kinship network to facilitate assessment of the family's ability to provide care for the child and to facilitate family decision-making. Criteria are presented for assessing the appropriateness of any permanent plan that eliminates the monitoring of the family by the child welfare system. Principles of permanency planning and family preservation are presented and discussed. Ways of assessing the adequacy of social support for potential permanent caregivers are presented. Assessment of social support is not complete without observation of interactions between key members of the kinship system. Ways of convening relevant members of the kinship network are discussed.

Goals for Unit IV: Convening the Kinship Network

This unit is intended to assist child welfare caseworkers in gaining:

1. skills in assessing the appropriateness of various permanent plans;
2. the ability to apply permanency planning and family preservation principles;
3. the ability to assess adequacy of social support and identify key members of the kinship network;
4. skills in convening relevant members of the kinship network.

UNIT IV DISCUSSION: Convening the Kinship Network

When children are taken into state custody, the informal system has broken down and failed to protect the children. It is the role and responsibility of the child welfare practitioner to assist the family, including the extended family/kinship system in strengthening its ability to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of its children. The child welfare system must also assess the family's ability to care for the children in the near future, without monitoring by the child welfare system. Reunification with parents, adoption, and assumption of private guardianship by the caregiver eliminates monitoring of child safety by the child welfare system and are appropriate if the intended permanent caregiver has an adequate support system, can protect the child from maltreatment, has considered with her/his support system caring for the child as the child grows older and changes occur in the caregiver's family or support system, and has made an *informed* decision regarding the permanency plan (Figure IV-A). Meetings with members of the child's kinship network are ways of determining if these criteria are met or can be met in the near future.

Convening Meetings with Members of the Child's Kinship Network

To convene is to bring a group of people together, to assemble a group of people for a particular purpose. Convening skills are essential for good child welfare practice. Child welfare caseworkers make decisions and also help families make their own decisions. Convening meetings with key members of the child's kinship network to facilitate their decision-making regarding the safety, permanent living arrangement, and well-being of the child is an efficient and effective way of assessing whether the child's family has the capacity to care for the child without the involvement of the child welfare system.

**Figure IV-A: Criteria for Assessing the Appropriateness of
Permanent Plans**

Reunification, adoption, or assumption of private guardianship by the caregiver eliminates monitoring of child safety by the child welfare system. This is appropriate if the following exist or can be developed:

! The intended permanent caregiver, whether that person is a biological parent, current relative caregiver, or another relative has an adequate support system

- C child care/respice care;
- C emotional support;
- C concrete support (financial, transportation, etc); and
- C other essential supports.

! The intended permanent caregiver and her/his social support system can protect the child from maltreatment without the monitoring and assistance of the child welfare system.

- C a safety plan has been developed with the caregiver and her/his support system;
- C the caregiver and her/his support system have demonstrated the ability to consistently implement the safety plan.

! The intended permanent caregiver has considered with her/his support system:

- C caring for the child as the child grows older;
- C care of the child if the caregiver becomes ill or dies; and
- C care of the child if other changes occur in the caregiver's family or support system.

! The intended permanent caregiver with her/his support system has made an *informed* decision for reunification/adoption/guardianship to occur:

- C commitment to raise the child to the age of majority;
- C clear understanding of the legal aspects of adoption/guardianship (if applicable);
- C redefinition of family roles in terms and ways that are comfortable for the caregiver(s), the child, the kinship system, and others in the social support system; and
- C determination and negotiation of the degree and type of "openness" desired in adoption--the degree and type of contact and responsibilities of members of the kinship network for any permanent plan.

If key members of the child's kinship network participate in a meeting to discuss the future of the child, they are demonstrating their interest in and commitment to the child. During meetings, caseworkers are able to assess the family's capacity for decision making, observing the family's leadership, their ability to solve problems and resolve conflict (harmony), and their ability to share tasks and provide support to each other (balance). Convening key members of the child's kinship network is also an effective and efficient way of creating a collaborative relationship between the informal network that hopefully will surround and support the child for life and the formal child welfare system that hopefully will have a short-term and temporary relationship with the child. Convening key members of the child's kinship network to facilitate a collaborative planning process is also an effective and efficient way of helping families strengthen their capacity to care for the child long after the child exits state custody.

Convening skills are also helpful in encouraging the child's biological parents, caregiver, and other members of the child's kinship network to participate in court hearings, administrative case reviews, and meetings with service providers. Caseworkers can explain to family members what will occur during the court hearing, case review, or meetings and what will be expected of them during these events. Some families and some family members need further preparation to be effective during these events. Caseworkers may invite family members to role play the court hearing, case review, or meeting. Important decisions that affect children and families are made at these events and the families affected by these decisions should be effectively involved whenever possible.

Convening members of the child's kinship network at the point of state involvement and throughout the child welfare system's involvement in the family's life is an effective and efficient way of creating a sense of urgency in the family and the child welfare system. If members of the child's kinship network can develop a plan to ensure the child's safety, to ensure that the child will live with adults who make a commitment to raise the child to the

age of majority, and to ensure that the child's developmental needs are met, there is no need for the child welfare system to remain involved in their life. If the caseworker has worked directly with members of the child's kinship network to develop the plan and to determine whether the kinship network is able to implement the plan, the caseworker is able to document evidence to support recommendations consistent with the family's plan.

Of course, it is important for caseworkers to work directly with the persons intended to be the child's permanent caregiver and with the child. Whether the child will be reunified with the biological parent(s), or live permanently with a relative who adopts the child or assumes legal guardianship of the child, it is also important to involve other members of the kinship network. The permanent caregiver will need various types of social support to be successful in rearing the child. Also, if the child is adopted by a relative or the relative becomes the child's legal guardian, members of the kinship network may need to redefine their roles to support the caregiver. The relationship between the child and biological parent will also need clarification. Successful kinship adoptions and guardianship arrangements have many of the characteristics of successful informal adoptions and formal open adoptions. The formal child welfare system cannot prescribe or define roles of family members. However, the child welfare caseworker can help families, including members of the child's extended family, to redefine their roles in ways that are comfortable to them and support a safe, permanent, living arrangement.

Social Support and Social Networks

The availability and responsiveness of a social support network has been shown to have a direct effect on reducing stress and increasing one's sense of well-being (Rothman, 1994; Tracy, 1990; Tracy & Whittaker, 1990). It is particularly important when one is going through troubled times. A social support network refers to a set of relationships that

provide nurturance and reinforcement for coping with life on a daily basis. Not all networks are socially supportive, nor do they always reinforce positive social behaviors. More people in a social network does not necessarily imply more support. The genogram and eco-map are both useful tools in assessing the adequacy of one's social support network. Constructing genograms and eco-maps with families and individual family members helps them identify members of their social network, the extent to which network members provide various types of support and the nature of relationships within the network as they perceive them. Several characteristics are important to consider in evaluating and intervening in social networks:

- ! *Size*: The number included in the network will affect each member's role in caregiving. Often, the more people in the network, the better caregiving responsibilities can be distributed to ease each individual's burden of support (balance). But more is not always better. One needs to evaluate the quality of the relationship and kind of support offered or demand experienced.

- ! *Helpfulness*: How willing to help are network members? Network members may be unwilling to help for a variety of reasons. For example, they may be burned-out, alienated, unwilling to be stigmatized by association.

- ! *Intensity*: This refers to frequency of contact with network members and degree of involvement these persons have in one's life. Intensity of involvement is positive if this intensity is reflected in positive support rather than conflict. A *harmonious* kinship system that has frequent contacts is likely to communicate more readily with each other and coordinate caregiving tasks.

- ! *Durability*: This represents the length of time that persons have been part of the

network existence. Long-term connection between a client and a network member is usually indicative of a more sustained level of social support. Acceptance of and sensitivity to each other's needs often increases with the permanence of the network. However, "familiarity can breed contempt," which is sometimes observed in long-standing conflicts in some families.

! *Accessibility and Proximity:* Physical location and openness in terms of availability of time and energy are

important considerations. Some family members, neighbors, friends, and community resources are closer and more accessible than others. Frequent telephone contact may serve to shorten physical distance.

! *Reciprocity:* A reciprocal relationship is one in which members of the social network provide and receive resources and support.

Figure IV-B: Assessing Social Support

- ! Who are the people in your life who would be really helpful for the types of problems we have discussed?
- ! What is your relationship to each of these persons? Are they relatives, friends, neighbors, work colleagues?
- ! How often do you see or talk to this person (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, less than yearly?)
- ! Who usually initiates contact?
- ! How far does this person live from you in minutes, using your usual mode of transportation?
- ! Do you feel you give more than you get, get more than you give, or that the relationship is fairly even?
- ! How long have you known this person?
- ! Which of these people know each other? In what ways do they know each other?
- ! With what organizations are you currently involved, including clubs, church groups, unions, ethnic organizations, or community activities? Are there other organizations with which you were recently involved but are no longer involved?

Adapted from Maguire, L. (1983). *Understanding social networks*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

The flow of support between network members goes both ways; there is an equal give and take. There is *balance*. When there is little reciprocity, persons consistently give more than they get or get more than they give. Uni-directional relationships are highly vulnerable to burn-out.

Maguire (1983) suggests some basic questions to help in developing a profile of clients' informal supports (Figure IV-B). Assessing adequacy of social support for potential permanent caregivers for children in kinship care is guided by the child welfare caseworker's role in facilitating child safety, permanency, and well-being. A commitment to principles of permanency planning and family preservation provides a focus to assessment of social support.

Commitment to Principles of Permanency Planning and Family Preservation

Convening family members of children in state custody is a challenge that requires a

Figure IV-C: Permanency Planning & Family Preservation Principles

- I. Respect for parents, caregivers and children
- II. Collaboration
 - A. A view of clients as colleagues
 - B. Working with vs. on parents, caregivers, other relatives, children
- III. Honesty and clarity regarding choices and consequences
 - A. With parents
 - B. With caregivers and other relatives
 - C. With children
- IV. Contracting and negotiating
- V. Keeping the focus on risk of harm to the child and a sense of belonging, permanence
- VI. A sense of urgency
 - A. Respecting the child's sense of time
 - B. Moving the case through the legal system

Principles adapted from:

Emlen, A., Lahti, J., Downs, G., McKay, A. & Downs, S. (1978). *Overcoming barriers to planning for children in foster care*. Portland, OR: Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University.

Kinney, J., Haapala, D. A., Booth, C., & Leavitt, S. (1991). The Homebuilders Model. In Tracy, E. M., Haapala, D. A., Kinney, J. & Pecora, P. J. (Eds.) *Intensive family preservation services: An instructional sourcebook*. Cleveland, OH: Mandel School of Applied

caseworkers to have strong commitments to permanency planning and family preservation as well as basic skills in convening family meetings. Principles that have guided successful permanency planning and family preservation projects provide a helpful orientation to caseworkers for bringing the resources of the formal child welfare system to strengthen and support the informal kinship system. These principles provide a framework for engaging the informal kinship system in a process that respects the family's customs, supports their helping traditions, while effectively moving the case through the child welfare system. Each of the principles are listed in figure IV-C and described briefly in the paragraphs that follow.

! *Respect for parents, caregivers, other relatives, and children:* The caseworkers attitudes towards the child and all members of the child's kinship network are communicated through the actions taken by the caseworker and the way the caseworker undertakes these actions. Caseworkers with a strong commitment to preserving families and ensuring permanency for children look for the strengths in parents and other members of the child's kinship system. Looking for strengths in people is a way of demonstrating respect for them. Persons who feel respected by the caseworker are more likely to participate in a meeting with the caseworker to plan for the future of the child in state custody. Caseworkers demonstrate respect for parents, caregivers, other relatives, and children by expecting their participation in decisions that affect their future.

! *Collaboration:* Caseworkers are not able to achieve goals of safety, permanent living arrangements, and well-being for children independently. Caseworkers need the active involvement of members of the child's kinship network to facilitate achievement of these goals, particularly if the permanent living arrangement is

within the child's current kinship system. Parents and other members of the child's kinship system have information that caseworkers need to make effective decisions and recommendations. Without the active involvement of the child's kinship system, the caseworker is forced to make recommendations with less information, and is unlikely to be able to recommend that the child exit state custody through a permanent living arrangement within the child's kinship system. For children with strong attachments to their kinship system, removing the child from that system and placing them with nonrelated adults is a traumatic experience of multiple losses. Parents, caregivers and other relatives, and older children are more likely to participate in meetings with the caseworker if the caseworker views these persons as colleagues in the process, if they work *with*, not *on*, parents, caregivers, other relatives, and children.

- ! *Honesty and clarity regarding choices and consequences:* When children are in the custody of the state, the child's current and future living arrangements must be approved by the formal child welfare system and the court. Effective work with parents, caregivers and other relatives, and children requires caseworkers to be honest regarding the policies and decisions of these systems. For example, while caseworkers work with parents toward reunification, parents, children, and other family members should be informed that it is the caseworker's responsibility to explore alternative permanency plans such as adoption or transfer of guardianship to a relative. If the parents are not able to remediate the harms that caused the child to enter state custody, alternative plans must be aggressively pursued. Caseworkers can explain these consequences while highlighting the choices that parents and other members of the kinship network can make to maximize the chances that their goals and preferences will be realized. Meetings with members

of the kinship network provide opportunities to provide information to them about the policies of the child welfare system, the choices available to them, consequences accompanying these choices, and the caseworker's role.

- ! *Contracting and negotiating:* Effective engagement of parents, caregivers and other relatives, and older children in a process of planning for the child's permanent living arrangement, requires that caseworkers negotiate with, rather than dictate to members of the child's kinship network. If members of the child's kinship network are to actively participate in the plan, the plan will must be directed toward goals with which they are in agreement. Also, caseworkers are not able to identify the potential barriers to achievement of any permanent plan without the active involvement of persons in the kinship system who need to live with the plan and carry out tasks that lead toward achievement of the permanency goal. These persons need to do more than agree with the plan. They need to actively shape the plan to ensure that the plan is relevant--and to ensure that they are sufficiently invested in the plan to commit themselves to ensuring the child's safety, permanency of living arrangement, and well-being over the long haul, long after the child exits state custody.

- ! *Keeping the focus on risk of harm to the child and a sense of belonging, permanence:* Many families that come into contact with the child welfare system have multiple needs. The primary focus of the child welfare system is on those needs that are related to the reason the child entered the child welfare system and those that must be addressed to ensure that the child is safe and living in a home with adults that make a commitment to raise the child to the age of majority. Work with children, parents, caregivers, and other relatives should focus on eliminating

risk of harm and ensuring that children have a sense of belonging and permanence.

The family will continue to have service needs after the child has been reunified with parents, adopted, or discharged from state custody through some other permanent living arrangement. Linking families to informal supports as well as formal community based agencies may be a way of helping families meet other needs to continue to strengthen and support them after the child leaves state custody.

- ! *A sense of urgency:* There are many factors that contribute to children drifting in foster care, without a sense of permanence. The caseworker can combat many of these factors with a sense of urgency and a commitment to helping the child exit state custody to a permanent home in the shortest time period possible. A sense of urgency helps move the case through the legal system. A sense of urgency inspires the caseworker to be prepared when going to court to avoid delays. If children can be safely reunified with their parents or are well cared for in a home with adults who are willing to adopt them or become their legal guardians, these goals should be aggressively pursued. In these cases, the sooner the child exits state custody, the better. If the child remains in state custody, caseworkers must regularly contact the child, the parents, and the caregiver and a degree of uncertainty remains in the child's life. This sense of uncertainty should be eliminated as soon as possible, ensuring children that their living arrangement is permanent and that they will not be removed by the courts or child welfare system. It is important to respect the child's sense of time. While six months may be a relatively short time period for all of the adults working in the child welfare system and the courts, it is a long time for children (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973; 1979). Two year old children removed from their parents for six months are away from their parents for one-quarter of their

lives.

**Guidelines for Convening
Members of the Child's
Kinship Network**

Convening members of the kinship network is a process that occurs in three stages (Figure IV-D). Stage one includes developing relationships with the members of the kinship system who are in most frequent contact with the caseworker and engaging these persons in a plan to facilitate safety, permanency, and well-being for the child. This includes the caregiver, others in the caregiver's household, the children in state custody and their biological parents. By completing a genogram and eco-map with these members of the child's family, the caseworker is beginning to develop a broad view of the family and identify persons who provide leadership, balance, or harmony within the kinship system. In the second stage, the caseworker looks beyond the caregiver's household and biological

Figure IV-D: CONVENING THE KINSHIP NETWORK

STAGE I

Engaging the part of the system closest to the caseworker--the caregiver system: The caregiver, children, caregiver's household, and the child(ren)'s biological parents

- ! Genogram
- ! Getting beyond the caseworker/primary caregiver dyad
- ! Interviewing more than one person at a time
- ! Observation skills

STAGE II

Identifying the extended kinship network

- ! Genogram and Eco-Map
- ! Pay particular attention to patterns of caregiving for young and old across generations
- ! Assess experience with informal and formal adoption
- ! Extending contacts to the extended kinship network

STAGE III

Convening the caregiving system involved with the permanency plan, along with its supports

- ! Deciding who to involve, how, when, where, etc. to facilitate:
 - < assessment
 - < development of the client service plan
 - C protecting the child
 - C permanency goal, objectives, tasks
 - < preparing and involving family network in the case review
 - < achievement of the permanency goal
- ! Extending the invitation to participate in the meeting

parents to identify other members of the kinship network who may be important to include in the assessment, planning, and decision-making on behalf of the child. In the final stage, the purpose for a meeting is identified, the persons to be invited to the meeting are identified, and the meeting is convened.

There are three major steps in the convening a meeting with members of the child's kinship network: (1) clarifying your role and the purpose of the meeting; (2) deciding who to invite to participate in the meeting; and (3) extending the invitation. Each of these steps are described in this section.

Clarifying Your Role and the Purpose of the Meeting: Meetings with parents, kinship caregivers, and/or other members of the child's kinship network should be clearly defined by a purpose relating to the reasons for the child welfare system's involvement in the family and to ensuring safety, a permanent home, and the well-being of the child in state custody. It is important to define your role to children and members of the child's kinship system when inviting them to meet with you. The purpose of each meeting should be clearly stated when invitations are made. Each persons identified as a potential contributor to the purpose of the meeting should be encouraged to attend and participate in the meeting. Members of the child's kinship network may be invited to meetings for a variety of purposes, including the following:

- ! to prepare for participation in court hearings or case reviews, since these are mechanisms used by the formal child welfare system to review case progress and make decisions about case disposition and the child's living arrangements;
- ! a meeting with the caseworker, the kinship caregiver, the child's parents, and other members of the kinship network to clarify why the child is in state custody, what needs to happen for the child to exit state custody, the caseworker's role, and how family members can be involved;
- ! a meeting with the caseworker, the kinship caregiver, and other members of the

child's kinship system, to determine which members of the kinship system are able to assist the caregiver in rearing the child on a temporary or permanent basis;

! a meeting with the caseworker, the kinship caregiver, and other members of the child's kinship system to determine what challenges they will face after the permanency goal is achieved, what service needs they may have, and how they will access services to meet these needs.

Deciding Who to Invite to Participate in the Meeting: Once the purpose of the meeting is clarified, the next step is deciding who should be invited to the meeting. Members of the child's kinship network who provide *leadership*, those who may be able to contribute to *balance* in the kinship system by sharing caregiving or other responsibilities, and those members who can contribute to the *harmony* of the kinship network should be invited to meetings with purposes to which they can contribute. However, it is also important to invite members of the kinship network who may present obstacles to implementation of a permanency plan. It may be impossible to implement a permanency plan that is opposed by an influential member of the child's kinship system. Inviting these persons to meetings with other family members allows the caseworker to facilitate discussion of differing points of view, resolution of conflict, and to determine whether referrals to mediation services or family counseling are required to facilitate achievement of a permanency goal.

If the caseworker is able to contact one or both of the biological parents early in the case, they may be helpful in identifying persons who should be involved and could contribute to successful reunification of the children with their parents. In some cases, the caseworker's initial and most frequent contact is with the child's kinship caregiver. In these cases it makes sense to work through the kinship caregiver to identify members of the kinship network to be invited to specific meetings, court hearings, or case reviews.

Sometimes the child's caregiver is reluctant to invite other members of the child's family to participate in meetings to discuss the child's future. Yet, the participation of these persons may be essential to achievement of the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for the child. With permission, the caseworker should attempt to personally contact the network members that the caregiver is reluctant to contact, or is unsuccessful in contacting, to invite them to a "family meeting."

Children may be asked to participate in some family meetings. Children who are old enough to understand the issues being discussed and can contribute to the discussion may be included in some meetings. In some cases, including children places them needlessly on the spot. In other cases the presence of children may prevent adults from "speaking their mind," thereby stifling the decision making process. In other cases, it may be inappropriate for children to hear adults discuss who should care for the child. Clearly it is important to involve the child in the assessment and decision making process, limiting this involvement according to the child's maturity and capability. At specific ages defined by state and local laws, children must consent to adoption or guardianship. Even at younger ages, caseworkers should involve children in discussions about their future permanent living arrangements; however, it is not appropriate for many of these discussions to take place in a family meeting. It is important for caseworkers to first have individual meetings with children about their own feelings about returning to a biological parent's home or living permanently with a relative. Subsequently children may feel more comfortable participating in family meetings and stating their views, opinions, and preferences.

Extending the Invitation: When family members are asked to participate in a court hearing, case review, or meeting about the child, they may expect to be blamed for the problems that brought the child into contact with the child welfare system. The involvement of members of the child's kinship network is needed to develop ways of solving problems,

not to fix blame. Family members are more likely to participate if they know that they are viewed as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. Therefore, when inviting family members to participate in a meeting, it is important to stress that their participation is needed to develop a plan to ensure that the children are safe and in a permanent living arrangement, so the child welfare and court system can make good decisions and get out of the family's life as soon as possible. The family member's knowledge of the family and concern for the child should be emphasized. It is important to clearly state the specific purpose of the meeting and the specific contributions that the family member may be able to make to achieving the purpose of the meeting.

Discussing Permanency

It is important to explain the goals of the child welfare system to all family members at the point that the child welfare system first is involved in their life. It is important for family members to understand that the goals of the child welfare system are to ensure that the child is safe and that the child is living in a permanent home within the shortest possible time period. It is important for the caseworker to be clear from the beginning of the case that the child welfare system's involvement in the life of a family is meant to be temporary. It is also important to explain that adoption or legal guardianship arrangements will be pursued if the biological parents are unable to remediate the conditions of risk that brought the child into care, and do so within a short time period. Reunification is certainly the preferred permanency goal when this can be safely and swiftly accomplished. However, it is important to do concurrent planning with families, to plan simultaneously for the child's reunification with the biological parent(s) and for an alternative permanent living arrangement in the event that reunification can not be safely achieved.

Being honest with family members from the beginning about the need for concurrent

planning is likely to reduce the length of time that a child remains in state custody. It will also make it easier to discuss alternative permanency plans such as adoption or assumption of legal guardianship of the child. It is not uncommon for kinship caregivers and other family members to express anger, dismay, and feeling of being deceived when the caseworker discusses the likelihood that the child will not return to live with a biological parent and asks family members to consider adopting the child or becoming the child's legal guardian. Involving the family in concurrent planning from the beginning of the case is likely to reduce these reactions. However, discussions about alternative permanency plans may not have an impact on family members earlier in the case because of their hopes and dreams that the biological parents will overcome their problems and soon be able to care for the child (Crumbley & Little, 1997). Caseworkers need to understand how difficult it is for caregivers and other family members to consider the possibility that their relative may never be able to care for the child. It is important that caseworkers allow caregivers to express the sense of loss, disappointment, and anger that they may feel when asked to consider adopting or becoming the legal guardian of their related child.

Accepting the reality that the child will not be reunified with a biological parent and considering adopting or assuming legal guardianship of the child takes time and several conversations. It is important that caseworkers meet several times with caregivers and other family members to discuss the need for permanency in the child's life and to help the family consider what permanency option makes the most sense for the child and the family. While many of these conversations may occur between the caseworker and the biological parents and between the caseworker and the current caregiver, it is important to involve more members of the kinship network in meetings to consider the best permanency plan for the child and for the family. It is also important to encourage the family to discuss their ideas for ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being for the child independent of the caseworker. It is only with sustained discussion of permanency options, planning for

permanency with the family, and a sense of urgency, that permanency is likely to occur for the child in a reasonable time period.

Summary

Facilitating safety, permanency, and well-being for children in kinship foster care requires a thorough assessment of the family's ability to care for the child without the ongoing involvement and monitoring of the child welfare system. This assessment requires that the caseworker develop relationships with many family members and have multiple opportunities to observe the family members interacting with each other. Family meetings are efficient and effective ways of making these observations. These meetings are opportunities to facilitate family decision-making and to identify the family's strengths and helping traditions. Convening members of the child's kinship network requires commitment to principles of permanency planning and family preservation, knowledge of the convening process, and the ability to discuss alternative permanency plans with members of the child's family.

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Learning Activities and Resources for Unit IV

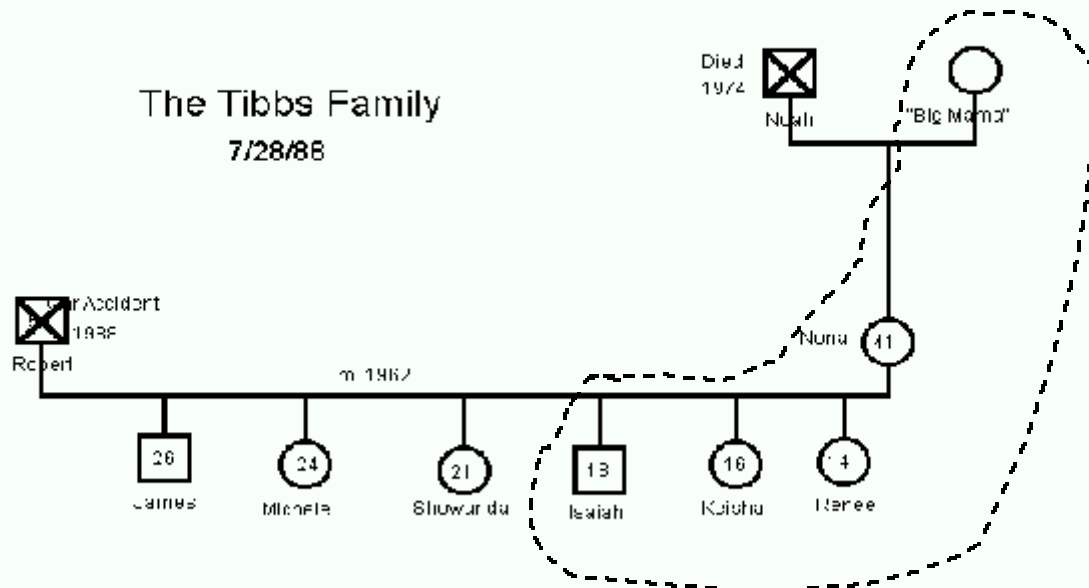
1. The Training Videotape: Segment Two
2. Additional Resources

Learning Activity #1 The Training Videotape: Segment Two

This scene, *Discussing Permanency and Assessing Social Support*, depicts an interview with the maternal grandmother that occurs approximately one year after the child entered state custody. The maternal grandmother is the child's current kinship caregiver and the interview takes place in her home.

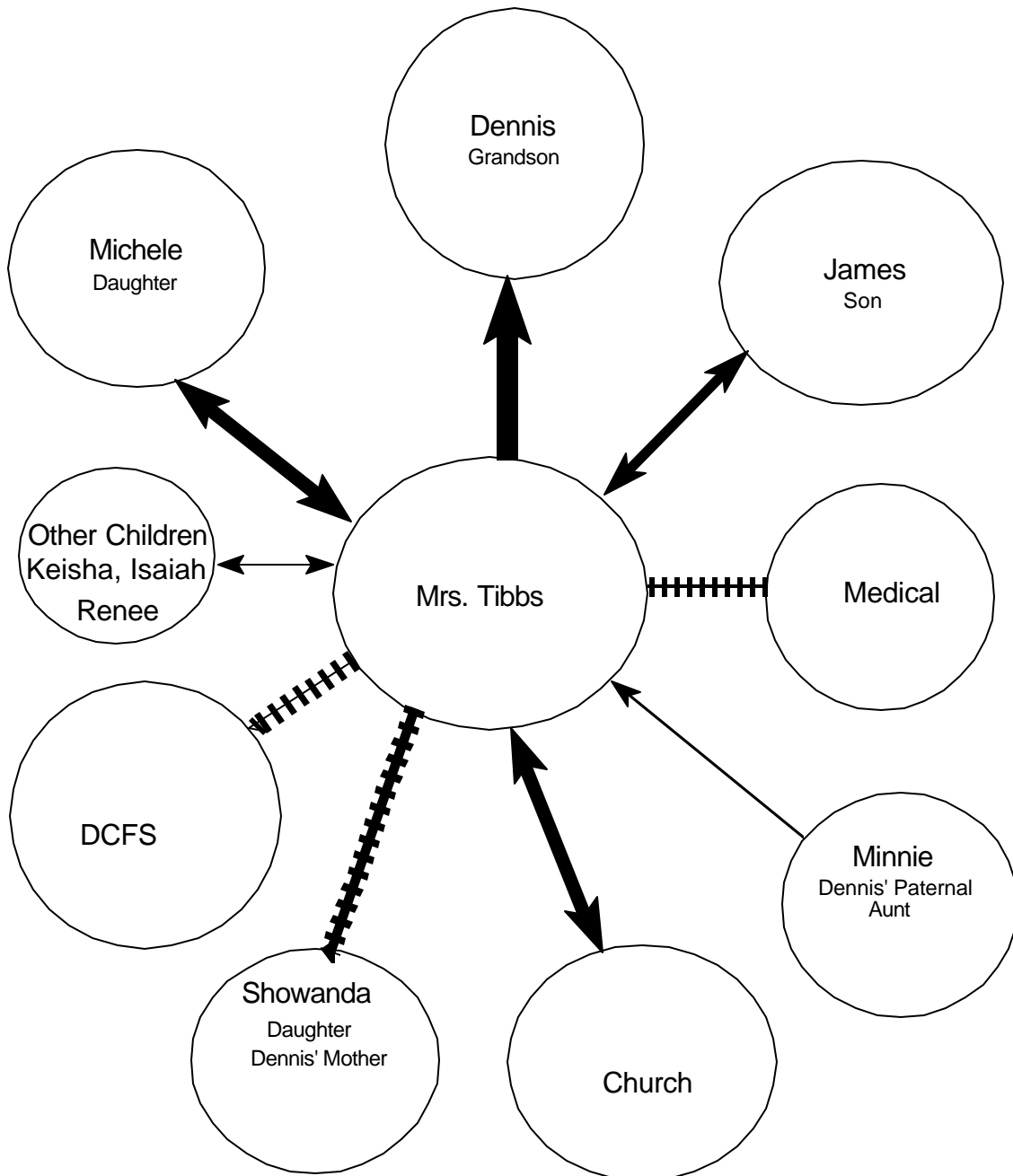
The caseworker discusses with the caregiver the likelihood that the child will not return home to the mother, and explores the caregiver's willingness to provide a permanent home for the child through adoption or legal guardianship. The caseworker demonstrates commitment to principles of family preservation and permanency planning. The caseworker also engages the kinship caregiver in a process of assessing the adequacy of her social network and initiates a discussion of the persons who might be invited to a family meeting to make permanent plans for the child. A genogram that depicts the Tibbs family in 1988 and an eco-map that depicts the caregiver's current social support system follow the description of this segment.

In this scene, the caregiver is upset with the suggestion that she consider adopting or assuming legal guardianship of her grandchild. She says that she feel deceived, that she was never told that she might be asked to adopt the child or become the child's legal guardian if the biological mother was unable to care for the child. The caregiver's reactions in this scene suggest that the caseworker may not have made it clear from the beginning of the case that the child welfare system's involvement in the life of a family is meant to be temporary, and that adoption or legal guardianship arrangements would be pursued if the biological parent was unable to remediate the conditions of risk that brought the child into care, and do so within a short time period. Certainly it is important to do concurrent planning with families, to plan simultaneously for the child's reunification with the biological parent(s) and for an alternative permanent living arrangement in the event that reunification can not be safely achieved. It may be that more effective concurrent planning may have reduced the anger, dismay, and feeling of being deceived displayed by the caregiver in this scene. However, it is also possible that the caseworker did discuss concurrent planning, the short term nature of the child welfare system's involvement, and the need for permanency in the child's life, but these words did not have an impact on the caregiver earlier because of the caregiver's hopes and dreams that her daughter would overcome her drug addiction and be able to care for her child. Caseworkers need to understand how difficult it is for caregivers and other family members to consider the possibility that their relative may not be able to ever care for the child and ensure the child's safety and well-being. It is important that caseworkers allow caregivers to express the sense of loss, disappointment, and anger that they may feel when asked to consider adopting or becoming the legal guardian of their related child.



Genogram depicting the Tibbs family in 1988, shortly after the death of Mr. Tibbs. Mrs. Tibbs was depressed and unable to provide care for her children. Mrs. Tibbs' mother, "Big Mama," moved in with the family and assumed responsibility for supervision and care of the three teenagers who were living in the home, until Mrs. Tibbs was able to resume her role as primary caregiver. Several years later, "Big Mama" once again returned to live with the Tibbs family when she became ill with cancer. These are examples of the rich tradition of shared caregiving in the Tibbs family.

Mrs. Tibbs' Eco-Map (current)



Additional Resources for Unit IV

Crumbley, J. & Little, R. L. (1997) *Relatives raising children: An overview of kinship care*. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America.

This book provides a good overview of the experience of kinship care from the perspectives of the child, the biological parents, the kinship caregiver, and other members of the kinship system (for example, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc). The book is very readable and is only 124 pages in length. The organization of the chapters and subsections makes the book a handy reference as well. To order specify stock #6843 ISBN 0-87868-684-3.

Write:

CSSC, c/o CWLA

P.O. Box 7816

Edison, NJ 08818-7816

Call:

800-407-6273 or

908-225-1900 EST

Fax:

908-417-0482

Handouts and Overheads for Unit IV

- ! Goals for Unit IV

- ! Figure IV-A: Criteria for Assessing the Appropriateness of Permanent Plans

- ! Figure IV-B: Assessing Social Support

- ! Figure IV-C: Permanency Planning & Family Preservation Principles

- ! Figure IV-D: Convening the Kinship Network

Goals for Unit IV: Convening the Kinship Network

This unit is intended to assist child welfare caseworkers in gaining:

1. skills in assessing the appropriateness of various permanent plans;
2. the ability to apply permanency planning and family preservation principles;
3. the ability to assess adequacy of social support and identify key members of the kinship network;
4. skills in convening relevant members of the kinship network.

Figure IV-A: Criteria for Assessing the Appropriateness of Permanent Plans

Reunification, adoption, or assumption of private guardianship by the caregiver eliminates monitoring of child safety by the child welfare system. This is appropriate if the following exist or can be developed:

- ! The intended permanent caregiver, whether that person is a birth parent, current relative caregiver, or another relative has an adequate support system
 - C child care/respite care;
 - C emotional support;
 - C concrete support (financial, transportation, etc); and
 - C other essential supports.

- ! The intended permanent caregiver and her/his social support system can protect the child from maltreatment without the monitoring and assistance of the child welfare system.
 - C a safety plan has been developed with the caregiver and her/his support system;
 - C the caregiver and her/his support system have demonstrated the ability to consistently implement the safety plan.

- ! The intended permanent caregiver has considered with her/his support system:
 - C caring for the child as the child grows older;
 - C care of the child if the caregiver becomes ill or dies; and
 - C care of the child if other changes occur in the caregiver's family or support system.

- ! The intended permanent caregiver with her/his support system has made an *informed* decision for reunification/adoption/guardianship to occur:
 - C commitment to raise the child to the age of majority;
 - C clear understanding of the legal aspects of adoption/guardianship (if applicable);
 - C redefinition of family roles in terms and ways that are comfortable for the caregiver(s), the child, the kinship system, and others in the social support system; and
 - C determination and negotiation of the degree and type of "openness" desired in adoption--the degree and type of contact and responsibilities of members of the kinship network for any permanent plan.

Figure IV-B: Assessing Social Support

- ! Who are the people in your life who would be really helpful for the types of problems we have discussed?
- ! What is your relationship to each of these persons? Are they relatives, friends, neighbors, work colleagues?
- ! How often do you see or talk to this person (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, less than yearly?)
- ! Who usually initiates contact?
- ! How far does this person live from you in minutes, using your usual mode of transportation?
- ! Do you feel you give more than you get, get more than you give, or that the relationship is fairly even?
- ! How long have you known this person?
- ! Which of these people know each other? In what ways do they know each other?
- ! With what organizations are you currently involved, including clubs, church groups, unions, ethnic organizations, or community activities? Are there other organizations with which you were recently involved but are no longer involved?

Adapted from Maguire, L. (1983). *Understanding social networks*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Figure IV-C: Permanency Planning & Family Preservation Principles

- I. Respect for parents, caregivers and children
- II. Collaboration
 - A. A view of clients as colleagues
 - B. Working with vs. on parents, caregivers, other relatives, children
- III. Honesty and clarity regarding choices and consequences
 - A. With parents
 - B. With caregivers and other relatives
 - C. With children
- IV. Contracting and negotiating
- V. Keeping the focus on risk of harm to the child and a sense of belonging, permanence
- VI. A sense of urgency
 - A. Respecting the child's sense of time
 - B. Moving the case through the legal system

Principles adapted from:

Emlen, A., Lahti, J., Downs, G., McKay, A. & Downs, S. (1978). *Overcoming barriers to planning for children in foster care*. Portland, OR: Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University.

Kinney, J., Haapala, D. A., Booth, C., & Leavitt, S. (1991). The Homebuilders Model. In Tracy, E. M., Haapala, D. A., Kinney, J. & Pecora, P. J. (Eds.) *Intensive family preservation services: An instructional sourcebook*. Cleveland, OH: Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western

Figure IV-D: CONVENING THE KINSHIP NETWORK

STAGE I

Engaging the part of the system closest to the caseworker--the caregiver system: The caregiver, children, caregiver's household, and the child(ren)'s biological parents

- ! Genogram
- ! Getting beyond the caseworker/primary caregiver dyad
- ! Interviewing more than one person at a time
- ! Observation skills

STAGE II

Identifying the extended kinship network

- ! Genogram and Eco-map
- ! Pay particular attention to patterns of caregiving for young and old across generations
- ! Assess experience with informal and formal adoption
- ! Extending contacts to the extended kinship network

STAGE III

Convening the caregiving system involved with the permanency plan, along with its supports

- ! Deciding who to involve, how, when, where, etc. to facilitate:
 - < assessment
 - < development of the client service plan
 - o protecting the child
 - o permanency goal, objectives, tasks
 - < preparing and involving family network in the case review
 - < achievement of the permanency goal
- ! Extending the invitation to participate in the meeting

