

CHAPTER VI: CAREGIVER VIEWS—RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS, CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

We asked caregivers to rate the frequency of their contact with the focus child's mother and father as well as the frequency of contact between the focus child and his or her mother and father using the following indicators: no contact, yearly contact, several times a year, at least monthly, weekly, or daily. We also asked them to rate the quality of their relationships with the focus child's mother and father using the following indicators: no contact, not at all friendly-much conflict, not at all friendly-some conflict, friendly-some conflict, very friendly-minor conflict, very friendly-no conflict. We asked caregivers to rate the quality of the focus child's relationship with the mother and father using these indicators: no contact, very poor, poor, neither poor nor good, good, or very good. While we did not ask caregivers to rate their own relationships with the children they were raising, many caregivers offered comments about these relationships. We summarize these comments in this chapter as well.

After rating the quality of the relationship with the mother and father, we asked caregivers to explain their ratings. Caregivers responded with narrative comments that we attempted to document. We summarize both the ratings and narrative responses in this chapter. Caregivers sometimes made comments about the quality of their relationship with the parents or the child's relationship with the parents during other segments of the interview. We have summarized these responses as well, even though they may not have been in response to a question that specifically asked about quality of relationships. In addition, we include interviewer's comments in our analysis and summary if they reflected either the interviewer's evaluation of the quality of relationships or the interviewer's attempt to summarize the caregivers' evaluation of the quality of these relationships. We once again remind the reader that

we did not audio tape caregiver interviews so although interviewers often tried to write down exactly what caregivers' said, most often what is written is not a direct quote but the interviewer's summary of the caregivers' statements or the interviewers' interpretations of what the caregiver said.

Contact between Caregivers and Parents and Child and Parents

Table 23 summarizes caregivers' ratings of how frequently they had contact with the focus child's mother and father. Nearly 80% of caregivers reported at least some contact with the mothers at wave 1, 3 and 4 and slightly more than 80% at waves 2. Less than 50% had at least some contact with the fathers at waves 1, 3 and 4, somewhat higher than 50% at wave 2. Over 20% reported daily contact with the mother across all waves; weekly contact was reported by 19% at wave 1 and approximately 25% at waves 2, 3, and 4. A smaller percentage of caregivers reported frequent contact with the fathers. Between 5% and 11% report daily contact with the fathers, depending upon the wave. Between 11% and 17% report weekly contact with fathers.

Caregivers reported patterns of contact between the focus children and their mothers that paralleled the contact reported between themselves and the mothers. Between 76% (wave 1) and 81% (wave 2) of the caregivers reported that there was at least some contact between the mothers and children. Between 19% (wave 1) and 27% (wave 4) report daily contact and between 19% (wave 1) and 24% (wave 4) report weekly contact. Contact between fathers and children was reportedly less frequent, with 54% (wave 2) to 49% (wave 1) reporting at least some contact, 7% (waves 1 and 4) to 11% (wave 2) reporting daily contact, and 14% (wave 2) to nearly 18% (wave 3) reporting weekly contact.

Table 23: Contact between Caregivers and Parents and Child and Parents

	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Waves</i>			
		<i>1st wave</i>	<i>2nd wave</i>	<i>3rd wave</i>	<i>4th wave</i>
Contact between caregiver and child's mother	No contact	43(20.8)	35(19.8)	39(22.9)	37(21.8)
	Yearly	8(3.9)	9(5.1)	5(2.9)	3(1.8)
	Several times/year	28(13.5)	20(11.3)	15(8.8)	19(11.2)
	At least monthly	42(20.3)	28(15.8)	33(19.4)	24(14.1)
	At least weekly	40(19.3)	47(26.6)	43(25.3)	42(24.7)
	Daily	46(22.2)	38(21.5)	35(20.6)	45(26.5)
	Total	207(100.0)	177(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		4.019 [0.547]	3.906 [0.563]	5.840 [0.322]
Contact between caregiver and child's father	No contact	108(52.4)	83(47.2)	87(51.2)	93(54.7)
	Yearly	11(5.3)	11(6.3)	2(1.2)	11(6.5)
	Several times/year	20(9.7)	18(10.2)	19(11.2)	11(6.5)
	At least monthly	25(12.1)	25(14.2)	18(10.6)	19(11.2)
	At least weekly	32(15.5)	19(10.8)	28(16.5)	25(14.7)
	Daily	10(4.9)	20(11.4)	16(9.4)	11(6.5)
	Total	206(100.0)	176(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		7.716 [0.173]	7.935 [0.160]	2.030 [0.845]
Contact between child and child's mother	No contact	50(24.2)	34(19.3)	35(20.6)	35(20.6)
	Yearly	8(3.9)	11(6.3)	5(2.9)	4(2.4)
	Several times/year	30(14.5)	18(10.2)	20(11.8)	25(14.7)
	At least monthly	40(19.3)	33(18.8)	33(19.4)	20(11.8)
	At least weekly	40(19.3)	40(22.7)	38(22.4)	40(23.5)
	Daily	39(18.8)	40(22.7)	39(22.9)	46(27.1)
	Total	207(100.0)	176(100.0)	170(100.0)	171(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		4.727 [0.450]	2.454 [0.783]	8.125 [0.149]
Contact between child and child's father	No contact	106(51.5)	82(46.3)	81(47.6)	81(47.6)
	Yearly	14(6.8)	8(4.5)	4(2.4)	15(8.8)
	Several times/year	17(8.3)	23(13.0)	17(10.0)	9(5.3)
	At least monthly	25(12.1)	20(11.3)	25(14.7)	25(14.7)
	At least weekly	30(14.6)	25(14.1)	30(17.6)	29(17.1)
	Daily	14(6.8)	19(10.7)	13(7.6)	11(6.5)
	Total	206(100.0)	177(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		5.202 [0.392]	5.539 [0.354]	2.794 [0.732]

Quality of Relationships between Parents and Caregiver

The caregivers' ratings of the quality of relationships between the caregivers and parents of the focus child are summarized in table 24. At least 35% of caregivers rated their relationships with the focus child's mother as very friendly, with no conflict or very friendly with only minor conflict at each of the 4 waves of data collection. The percentage of caregivers rating their relationships with the focus child's mother as not at all friendly, with much or some conflict ranged from 18% at wave 1 to 14% at wave 2, 15% at wave 3, and 12% at wave 4.

Table 24: Quality of Relationships between Caregiver and Child's Parents

	Responses	Waves			
		1 st wave	2 nd wave	3 rd wave	4 th wave
Relationship between caregiver and child's mother	Not applicable/no contact	38(18.5)	30(16.9)	30(18.0)	29(17.1)
	Not at all friendly-much conflict	15(7.3)	13(7.3)	15(9.0)	11(6.5)
	Not very friendly-some conflict	21(10.2)	12(6.8)	10(6.0)	9(5.3)
	Friendly-some conflict	55(26.8)	60(33.9)	51(30.5)	58(34.1)
	Very friendly-minor conflict	32(15.6)	38(21.5)	34(20.4)	37(21.8)
	Very friendly- no conflict	44(21.5)	24(13.6)	27(16.2)	26(15.3)
	Total	205(100.0)	177(100.0)	167(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		8.144[0.148]	5.300[0.380]	8.502[0.131]
Relationship between caregiver and child's father	Not applicable/no contact	101(49.3)	82(46.3)	85(50.0)	92(54.1)
	Not at all friendly-much conflict	6(2.9)	3(1.7)	2(1.2)	2(1.2)
	Not very friendly-some conflict	12(5.9)	6(3.4)	7(4.1)	6(3.5)
	Friendly-some conflict	28(13.7)	28(15.8)	16(9.4)	16(9.4)
	Very friendly-minor conflict	22(10.7)	26(14.7)	25(14.7)	22(12.9)
	Very friendly- no conflict	36(17.6)	32(18.1)	35(20.6)	32(18.8)
	Total	205(100.0)	177(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		3.508[0.622]	4.947[0.422]	4.702[0.453]

Twenty-eight percent of the caregivers rated their relationships with the focus child's father as very friendly with no conflict or very friendly with minor conflict at the first wave interview. This percentage increased to 33% at wave 2, 35% at wave 3, and dropped slightly to 32% at wave 4. Nearly 9% of the caregivers rated their relationship with the focus child's father as not at all friendly with much or some conflict at wave 1, and approximately 5% at waves 2, 3, and 4.

There are some apparent inconsistencies between tables 23 and 24 regarding the number of caregivers reporting no contact with parents. The number of caregivers reporting no contact is higher across all categories in table 23. This indicates that some caregivers rated the friendliness of their relationships with parents with whom they had no contact, rather than to rate these relationships as "not applicable/no contact."

In the process of telling their stories some caregivers elaborated on their relationship with the biological parent of the child in their care. Some caregivers expressed frustration with the

biological parents for not taking responsibility for their children. Other caregivers expressed love and affection for the biological parents despite the difficulty that comes with caring for a relative's child:

My daughter's had some problems, but I love her. I don't hold her addiction against her. I love my kids. She's got good mental attitude and the kids are happy...

I love my daughter a lot, she's very smart, but being a mother is not a priority.

Many caregivers talked about conflicts that they had with the biological parents. One caregiver expressed concern that the biological parent would take the child back at any moment:

I'm concerned that her mother can come at any time and take her back. That would be fine if she really wanted to be a mother to her daughter. I think she's thinking about taking her back just to get the check for her every month. When you think about it this child was taking care of her mother. If she tries to take her I'll fight her in court...

Other caregivers described the anger they felt toward the biological parents. These caregivers felt that when the biological parents were around they disrupted things and challenged the caregiver's authority with the children in their care:

The mother was in jail and now she says things that make you think that being in jail is all right. We don't get along.... My biggest problem comes with the parent. My daughter undermines everything I do. But if there is some kind of way to keep the children, do it. But if they can't then that's okay. I worked for the DCFS system one time.

When I got [focus child] at 2 ½ years old, it would have been better if her mom was not in and out of her life, because now there are constant power struggles.

The biological parent's drug use was an issue for some caregivers. The parent's drug use was a source of frustration and pain for the caregivers and the children:

Well, I say it's rough, it is rough, rough, rough. Sometimes, ya just wanna throw it in. It's not the grandkids, it's my daughter. She hard-headed.... I tell ya, I'm gonna be honest with ya. It's not easy, especially when you're dealing with a parent who's on drugs. You get hurt a lot. I try to help. I look at it and say, that ain't (daughter/biological mom), that them drugs.

Several interviewers summarized the caregivers' concerns and frustrations regarding the biological parents' drug use:

The caregiver was very open and talkative. She spoke about being frustrated with her daughter because when she got weekend passes from the inpatient drug rehab facility she seemed to want to spend more time with her boyfriend than her children. She also said she was afraid all her daughter's hard work to stay clean would go down hill if she continued with her current boyfriend who had substance abuse problems himself.

The caregiver appeared to be very upset with her daughter. She said she shows no interest in her children and uses one of her son's child support to support her drug habit.

Some interviewers recalled that the caregiver was afraid that the biological parent would take the child back:

She became tearful just talking about the possibility of her daughter wanting the kids back. She had very positive things to say about her daughter, but feel she is the true mother to her grandchildren.

Other interviewers elaborated on how some caregivers seemed disappointed in the biological parents of the children in their care:

Caregiver seemed really disappointed in her daughter's behavior. Having four children at a young age and not being able to take care of them.

One interviewer restated some of the interpersonal conflict between a caregiving couple and the biological mother:

Caregivers are overwhelmed by the actions of their daughter...disruptive behavior during visitations, irresponsible behavior and return visits to court...The caregivers seemed very angry with their daughter...There is a lot of tension between the caregiver and her daughter.

While there were many comments reflecting the stress and conflict in the relationships between the caregiver and biological parent, one interviewer noted that the caregiver was supportive of the biological parent taking responsibility for the children in her care:

... [Caregiver] expressed pride and support toward her daughter's progress maintaining employment, securing housing for a few months and assuming parental responsibility for her two children (3 total) who resided with caregiver.

Quality of Relationships between Parents and Child

We also asked caregivers to rate the quality of the relationships between the focus child and his or her parents (Table 25). Nearly 54% of caregivers rated the quality of the focus child's relationship with the mother as good or very good at wave 1, 57% at wave 2, 56% at wave 3, and 55% at wave 4. About 11% rated this relationship as poor or very poor at all 4 waves. Thirty-seven percent of caregivers rated the focus child's relationship with the father as good or very good at wave 1, 45% at wave 2, 40% at wave 3, and 38% at wave 4. Between 5% (waves 1, 3, and 4) and 7% (wave 2) of caregivers rated the focus child-father relationship as poor or very poor. We also asked caregivers to explain their ratings. These explanations and other comments caregivers or interviewers made about the quality of relationships between the children and their mothers and fathers are described in this section.

Table 25: Relationship between Child and Parents

	Responses	Waves			
		1 st wave	2 nd wave	3 rd wave	4 th wave
Relationship between child and child's mother	Not applicable/no contact	37(18.0)	29(16.4)	32(18.8)	30(17.6)
	Very poor	11(5.3)	9(5.1)	10(5.9)	11(6.5)
	Poor	11(5.3)	10(5.6)	8(4.7)	7(4.1)
	Neither poor nor good	36(17.5)	29(16.4)	25(14.7)	29(17.1)
	Good	48(23.3)	43(24.3)	52(30.6)	53(31.2)
	Very good	63(30.6)	57(32.2)	43(25.3)	40(23.5)
	Total	206(100.0)	177(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		0.352[0.997]	3.385[0.641]	4.351[0.500]
Relationship between child and child's father	Not applicable/no contact	103(51.0)	72(41.9)	79(46.5)	80(47.6)
	Very poor	4(2.0)	4(2.3)	5(2.9)	3(1.8)
	Poor	5(2.5)	8(4.7)	3(1.8)	6(3.6)
	Neither poor nor good	15(7.4)	10(5.8)	16(9.4)	15(8.9)
	Good	33(16.3)	36(20.9)	29(17.1)	27(16.1)
	Very good	42(20.8)	42(24.4)	38(22.4)	37(22.0)
	Total	202(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)	168(100.0)
	Chi-Square [p-value]		4.940[0.423]	1.525[0.910]	0.924[0.968]

We see the same type of apparent inconsistencies between tables 23 and 25 regarding the number of caregivers reporting that the children had no contact with parents as we observed in comparing caregiver reports of their contact with parents in tables 23 and 24. The number of caregivers reporting no contact is higher across all categories in table 23. This indicates that some caregivers rated the quality of the child's relationships with parents with whom they had no contact, rather than to rate these relationships as "not applicable/no contact."

Mother-child Relationship

Lack of contact. When asked to describe the child's relationship with his or her mother, a number of relative caregivers indicated the level of contact between the focus child and biological mother. One caregiver indicated that the child does not have enough contact with her mother to really know her or to develop an attachment to her. Another indicated that the child "hasn't spoken or seen mom in over 5 years." Interviewers summarized other caregivers' descriptions of the lack of contact in the following ways:

They do not see each other and he does not remember his mother.

Because child and I have no contact with either parent.

There's no contact with his mother.

She doesn't come to see him.

No relationship; don't see each other much.

They don't have a relationship at all as far as I'm concerned.

They don't have...I know that [name of mother] loves her, but they don't have a bond you would have with a child...I mean, she love her mother. I've never seen the two of them together.

Child does not know mother...No contact or relationship...He don't see her - doesn't know her.

She is now in drug rehab. She doesn't know her mother.

She doesn't see her that often.

Bio mom is not making that much contact with child...They speak...basically, he just been with me.

Children have no contact with their mother...They barely see their mother but they love her very much. They know she has problems (drug use/mental illness).

Child only saw bio mom 3 times in last year and ½...She knows who her mother is and is excited that she is coming home.

In some cases, caregivers limit contact between the child and parent. For example, one interviewer describes the contact between the child and parent in this way: “She doesn’t see her that much, but the caregiver doesn’t allow the child to see her mother that much because she promises the child things she can’t do.”

One of the children in this study is the only child in her sibling group that has very little contact with her mother. This is because a family friend plans on adopting this child only and does not want the child to have contact with biological mother. The other siblings see their mother nearly every week. The focus child and her mother enjoy the time they have together when available.

In some families, the parent-child relationships are limited by distance. The interviewer paraphrased one caregiver’s words in this way, “Child’s mother lives in another state. Child obviously loves and misses her mother a lot. We all get a long fine, but there are times I feel she could do more.” Another caregiver indicates that the child in her care enjoys seeing his mother, but contact is limited because the mother “does not have time for her child.” This caregiver indicates, “She and I get along fine because she knows I understand the way she is and I don’t judge her.”

One caregiver describes a heart-breaking story of a mother who left the child nine months prior to the initial interview and may not return. The interviewer paraphrases the caregiver in this way:

She loves and misses her mom. She also ask lots of questions about mom and want to be with her...The mother will not be coming back to Chicago. She left the children and moved there about 9 months ago. Recently called and said she has a new life and when she gets herself together she'll make a place for her children which translates to "I'm not coming back." The father of [focus child] has been out of her life from birth. I can't even tell you what he looks like.

In some families, contact and the quality of parent-child relationships vary even among members of the same sibling group. One caregiver described varied relationships among the children in one sibling group she is rearing and their mother and father. According to this caregiver, the two oldest girls have frequent contact with father and mother. The younger boy [focus child] has limited contact with his mother but no contact with his father. According to this caregiver, the boy does not have a good relationship with his mother but he loves her and tries to impress her. He thinks this will somehow make her stop using drugs.

Positive relationships. One caregiver indicated that she had not seen mother and child interact, but, upon return from visits with the mother, the child is happy, adjusted and speaks favorably of time spent with mother. Another caregiver said, "She's only six year old. She loves her mommy. There's no one like mom." Yet another caregiver described the relationship as "Neither poor nor good yet, she is just a kid." A number of other caregivers described positive relationships between the mother and child. One interviewer described the caregiver's comments this way: "When caregiver sees them together they have a good time, lots of laughter and smiles." Another caregiver indicated that the child she cares for loves her mother and looks forward to seeing her. The caregiver described the relationship as good because there is no conflict. However, the mother is described as more of a friend than a parent, who does not

discipline her daughter. Yet another caregiver described a different relationship between the child she is raising and that child's mother. The caregiver described the relationship as "good because she (the child) doesn't pull the stunts that she pulls with me; she gives her mom respect." The child reportedly communicates well with her mother and still wants to be with her.

Interviewers paraphrased other caregivers' statements describing positive relationships between children and their mothers in the following ways:

Talk to each other and get along well. Children like to be around mom.

They have no problem with their mother. That is their mother, the caregiver is just their aunt and they know that.

Child is happy to see mom when she comes around...He listens to her well. He respects her.

Child and mom use to do things together and get along very well...That's the only person he wants to be with.

They get along well now that he is not living with his bio mom.

He love his mom. She don't take no stuff from him...that is his mother, they like each other.

Because they have good conversation on the phone, she is interested in the child's day.

Because they have a very good relationship. She's a good mother...They are very affectionate with each other. They have a good relationship.

Children are glad to see mother when she visits, but doesn't complain when she leaves.

I think they get along very good together...They just - that's the best two I've ever seen. Very special. [Child] loves her mom and she love [child].

[They] get along... I'd say it's more than good. It's amazing! [Child] respects her mother.

He's always very positive when speaking about his mother. He's always happy to see her...He gets excited about talking to and seeing her.

Several caregivers stated that the children in their care and their mothers have a loving relationship.

They love each very much and show each other that...it's very good. They have a good relationship...

The children and I have a good relationship with their mother...He loves his mother and they have a very good relationship.

Child loves mother and wants to be around mother.

The children love their mother.

She loves and respects her mother.

Child understands who his mother is and loves her...He loves his mother.

He loves his mom and I encourage him...He loves his mother.

A number of caregivers used stronger language to describe the positive connection between the mother and child, indicating that the child “worshipped the mother” or using other words to describe the child’s very strong positive feelings toward the mother.

It's good. He know that's his mother, when she walks through the door he won't let her go...He's a mama's boy. He would rather sleep outside in the cold with his mama instead of go with someone else. He loves his mama. He's very smart. He knows she doesn't follow through.

Because I feel they are crazy about each other.

He loves his mother. He belongs to her and she belongs to him...He loves the ground she walks on.

Because [focus child] wants to be with her mom - she thinks her mom is perfect.

One caregiver indicated that the child loves his mother but is actually closer to the caregiver than the mother: “He loves his mother...It’s pretty good, but he’s more closer to me than his mom.” Another caregiver stressed that the children love their mother very much and look past the mother’s weaknesses.

Children love their mother even though she did a lot of things to them...The kids really love both their parents...He loves her, despite herself...They love their mother very much.

Some caregivers responded to this question by explaining that although the child and parent love each other, the parent is not able to care for the child:

He loves his mother and she loves him. She is just in no shape to take care of her children.

Some caregivers indicate that the lack of frequent contact, the fact that the mother does not have regular responsibility for caring for the child and is less strict, results in the limited contacts being enjoyable for the mother and the child. Others describe some of the things that contribute to a positive mother-child relationship.

When they see her they are glad to see her...They do little different stuff together. She takes him more than the other boys...He do listen to her. He do what he's told

She tries to pay attention to him and... is patient with him...It's cool, 'cause I get jealous of them sometimes.

Talk to her daily, want to go and visit her in [state where parent lives]. When she visits they spend a lot of time together.

Child's mother visits mostly on holiday's (Christmas) and birthdays; sometimes bio mother takes child to the movies...They get along good no fighting.

Whenever she comes around, she's happy to see her...Well, they laugh a lot. They talk a lot, when she do come around. When you realize she at the door, it's 'my mama here, my mama here!' They hide her shoes...

When her mother come to visit, she seems to enjoy being around her.

One caregiver describes a positive relationship between a mother and child who are planning to live together in the near future.

The children's mother visits them every week and is helping out more than she did in the past...The children always enjoy spending time with their mother. She [the child] get along very well with her mother and is excited about the possibility of going to live with her again.

Another describes the children's relationship with their mother who is now living in the caregiver's home with the children and with her new baby:

Children seem to be happy that mom is in the home, really love the new baby...He loves his mother.

Other caregivers associate the positive mother-child contact with the amount of time they spend together:

Child loves mother and always glad to see her...[Child] is allowed to spend weekends with his mother sometimes and says he enjoy her company.

Because he loves his mother and very affectionate...They love each other...Because she's his mother. They talk and play together. They spend time together. She makes him mind.

Because they're with her everyday.

Because she interacts with him often, they keep in touch well.

She shows her a lot of love - very close - calls everyday. Talk to him a lot...They are real close.

She is here in the house...She lives here and cares for a younger child.

She pays attention toward her kids.

He sees his mother every week and loves her very much.

Another caregiver indicated that the child she is raising is always glad to see his mother and he doesn't really understand why he is not able to live with his mother and father. The caregiver's words suggest that the child is resigning himself to the fact that he will not be living with his parent: "he's loving toward her with no conflict...He doesn't talk about her as much as he used to."

Limited, somewhat positive relationship. A number of caregivers indicated that the children loved their mothers, were aware of their struggles and shortcomings, and they overlooked these limitations. One caregiver states it this way: "They get along. She is happy

when she sees her mother and she over looks what she sees just to have the opportunity to spend time with her.” Another caregiver describes the relationship between the child and her mother who lives in another state this way:

Um, the only thing I can say is it's as well as could be expected with the distance between the two...When they communicate, they have open communication and they are happy to talk with each other. They get along. Mother lives outside of Illinois.

According to their caregivers, some children are anxious to be with their mothers, but the mothers are preoccupied with other things:

Child likes being with her mother...It's good because she still wants to be around her mother...She loves her mother and her mother does love her. She wants to please her mother...[Focus Child] has not spent a lot of time with her mother. When she is with her mother, mom has a man-friend that she has to share her time with.

They get along very well...I think their relationship is very good and loving, just continually interrupted...because they don't have enough contact and her mother is not the best role model. However, they're simply in love. Her mother can do no wrong.

She loves her...They love their mother and she loves them back. But their mom is on drugs and that hurts them...Because I think it bothers [child] that she doesn't see her mom more often and she hold it inside.

Children's relationship with mom was good before she was incarcerated...[Focus child] doesn't know mother - she talks to her, but doesn't know the "true" mother.

Pretty good relationship: sometimes mom gets in her moods...[Focus Child] brings out the best in people, they enjoy each other.

Other caregivers describe very limited but somewhat positive relationships in the following ways:

It's good, for birthdays and stuff. She do try to do things.

Because she loves her mom regardless of anything.

Because she still loves her mom and mom can never do wrong...they get along.

When we do the live video (jail service) Ashley is excited and sees/talks with mom nicely.

Frequent contact, not necessarily a good relationship. Regular contact is not always predictive of a positive mother-child relationship. Some caregivers describe it this way:

Mother is home all the time...She argues with him a lot. She wants him to do things that she should be doing...They argue a lot. He tells me about it...They talk and get along most of the time.

They have regular contact with their mother, but the relationship is not outstanding on either side of the spectrum.

Sometimes child does not want mother here and when mom is here she is not paying attention to her.

Neutral relationships. Several caregivers described the relationship between the mother and child as neither positive nor negative:

Because he's friendly with everybody so he's friendly with her. He only sees her every couple of months...Because he does not know her.

Does not complain when mom is not around, but doesn't mind seeing her when she comes around.

... They can take her or leave her...It's no big deal to them.

Ambivalence. Some of the caregivers' responses suggest that children in kinship care are ambivalent about their mothers. One caregiver stated, "He sees her downfalls but he doesn't want to believe them." Others described the child's ambivalence this way:

I think they're very close, but I think she's kinda jealous though. She's torn between three homes, but I think she handles it well.

Because all kids have an innate desire to love their mom but she now understands why she is cared for by me.

The child's views of the mother may change over time as well. During one interview a caregiver stated, "When she comes around, he respects her. But, it is not a fun relationship nor does he have mad feelings toward her. He is just like, whatever." However, during a subsequent

interview the same caregiver stated about the same child, “He adores his mother...She can do no wrong in his eyes.” Another caregiver said about the child in her care, “His mother calls him on the phone monthly but never visit him. He always enjoys talking to her,” but during another interview stated, “Sometimes he does not want to talk to her on the telephone. She doesn’t follow-up on promises. She is an alcoholic.” Other caregivers describe the children’s ambivalence around visiting their mothers:

He loves his mother and they get along well...Sometimes when he’s with her he wants to come home.

He love his mother and happy to be with her...There are no problems when mom visit child but he chooses not to spend time away from home with her.

For some children the ambivalence is related to accepting direction from a mother who has been away and may expect to return home to assume or resume the mother role:

She love her mother and is happy that she is out of jail and they can spend time with her everyday. Well, she like her mother bein’ at home and she talks to her mother. [Focus child] is special. She feel like if her mom tells her something. She may not wanna do it.

Role reversal in child-mother relationship. Some caregivers describe the relationship between the child and parent as one of role reversal, with the child playing the caregiver role or taking responsibility for maintaining the mother-child relationship. One caregiver described the child’s role in this relationship this way: “Very loving, trustworthy. She takes good care of her mother. [Child] knows her mom and loves being with her.” One caregiver responded to the question about the relationship between the mother and child by indicating that the child is concerned about and protective of his biological mother and wonders “Is she happy?” Another caregiver reports that the child she is raising “adores her mom and wants the best for her.” She indicates that this child worries about her biological mother’s well being. According to the caregiver, the child takes primary responsibility for maintaining the relationship with her mother

but the mother is preoccupied with feelings of guilt and "...mom pushes her away at a certain point." Another caregiver described the child in her care and his view of his parents as "overprotective, he's overprotective of her. In his eyes, both his parents can do no wrong." Children's concerns and worries about their mothers are sometimes related to the parent's substance abuse. One child reportedly tried to behave in ways that would inspire his mother to avoid drugs. Another caregiver indicates, "She's a 10 year old kid and she loves her mother...Because she still asking her about being clean (not using drugs), yet she's happy to see her when she see's her."

Child would like more contact with parent(s). Several caregivers reported that the children in their care would love to have more contact with their mothers. For example, one interviewer summarized the caregiver's comments this way: "mom visits when she wants, child would like her to come over more often." An interviewer describes a different caregiver's description of the relationship between the mother and a child who desperately wants a relationship with her mother and father here:

Mother is living in the basement apartment. The child still lives with the grandparents on the first floor. Mother does try to help out at times. She is going through some things...[Focus child] wants a mother and father. Sometimes her reality is colored with the way she wants it not the way it is. Her mother seldom takes her any place, hardly comes to see her. She makes promises she does not keep. [Focus child]'s mother has told her child to lie for her to her grandparents on several occasions.

A number of other caregivers report similar situations where the child would like much more contact with the mother:

She would love to have the ideal family relationship, her mom and baby sister. Love for her mother pulls her toward her, but she knows it's not the ideal situation. [Child] simply doesn't understand why her mother "doesn't want her." She is confused...Because [child] loves her mom very much but [child] doesn't feel that her mom loves her back very much, and she doesn't understand

why...[Child] pursues her mother a lot more than her mother pursues her. Her mother is not as involved as she should be.

She just wants to be with her...She does not spend a lot of time with her mom...It's hard for the kids too. The kids know and love their mother. It's not easy for them to be without her.

He's glad to see her all of the time... [Focus child] loves his mother and does not get to see her. That's about it.

Parent disappoints child. Other parents also reportedly get their children's hopes up and then disappoint them by making promises that they do not keep:

She would give him little candy; tell him stories. She had him thinking that she was going to take them to Las Vegas.

The children love their mother but hates that she does not keep promises made to them...Children does not see much of their mother but when they do she will always promise them things and never do anything about getting back to them...She just don't care about him no more...Because he really don't see her, so how can he have a chance for it to be good or bad.

When he does see his mom, he is excited and happy and he also gets to see his two younger brothers...Because that's your mother, no matter what...Because she would promise him things and not follow through.

Mother does what she can. A few caregivers reported that the biological mother “does take some responsibility for child.” One caregiver indicated that the child adores the mom and mom does what she can for the child...”She’s very involved and responsible.” Another caregiver states, “He has a very good relationship with his mother. She help me take care of him and he loves her a lot.” Another caregiver describes a good relationship between mother and child that includes the mother spending the weekend with the child:

Uh, it's good because he usually leaves her little notes saying, 'I love you...On the weekends, she takes the kids. They spend quality time together.

Shared care. One caregiver described a complicated story of a child with multiple and complex needs and a mother who is unable to care for her child independently, yet participates in

the care of the child on a regular basis. The child's mother keeps him 50% of the time on weekends. The caregiver complains about the level of care the child receives from the mother while he is there but states that she (the caregiver) gets tired and needs a break. The caregiver said this child loves his mom but he too complains about his care. The child reportedly states that his mother is mean, curses and hollers at him. However, the caregiver states, "A child will love their parents regardless. The mother promises a lot but usually lets him down."

Poor quality/strained relationships. Some caregivers described poor quality and strained relationships between the children in their care and their parents. One caregiver explained that the strain between the mother and children is partly due to the lack of contact between the mother and children, partly due to the expectation that children have relationships with their parents, and partly due to the fact that the mother is not a very good parent:

Because they have been here they have not seen her a lot. They are afraid of making her mad...because she is her mom and [focus child] supposed to have a relationship with her and love her and her mom is not a good parent.

Some caregivers indicated that the children in their care were angry with their parents. When asked to explain her rating of a poor relationship between the child and parent, one caregiver said, "Because she abandoned him and I think he's angry with her." Other caregivers responded to the question about the quality of the relationship between the mother and child by describing the mother's inability to care for the child, the fact that the child was not wanted, or by providing a description of the ways that the mother neglected the child:

Mom didn't want child and treated him badly. No bond between child and mom...She would leave him with anybody and she treated him like he was 16 and he is only 2.

Interviewers paraphrased other caregivers' descriptions of the strained or poor quality relationships in the following ways:

Due to daughter's (child's mother) illness there is always some conflict in the home.

Strained. Sometimes he wants to go and sometimes he doesn't...because he loves her and he doesn't understand everything.

He loves her but doesn't want to be around her...He knows that's his mom, but he doesn't really want to stay with her.

Child doesn't want to be bothered with her. Mom doesn't keep promises. She is strung out on drugs...Because of mom's broken promises and continued drug use the kids are becoming more distant from her.

Says he loves his mom but doesn't always want to visit with her...Because he says he doesn't want to know his mother, he doesn't consider her family. She doesn't get in touch with him.

Rarely sees her, he gives her props when around, but he doesn't trust her...Because he rarely sees her and is scared of her...He does not want to be with her. She is rude belligerent. She cusses him out.

Mother has not been there for children. Children do not want to talk to mother...He hardly sees her...Very, very poor. No contact.

Mother don't do anything for the kids. Just hangs out in the streets. I fuss with her because she don't do nothing. That's bad. They love her but don't want to live with her. She beats the heck out of them.

Child does not want to have anything to do with mother. When he sees her he doesn't want anything to do with her.

Because she lies to him, she makes promises and doesn't fulfill her end. They (kids) ask very little of her...Because the different changes she takes him thru and not being the mother she should be...She does not interact with him. She does not display interest in her kids at all...Conflict with family and mom, mom is using drugs.

She can't develop a good relationship with her mom because she doesn't see her often...She feels that her mother doesn't like being with her or love her.

[Child] will call and ask about her...there's no contact, no relationship. She doesn't call on her birthday. It's like there's no concern. Don't call on Christmas. Don't call to see how grades are.

Because her mom doesn't use encouraging words of support or praise towards focus child. Her mother wants to use militant discipline rather than nurturing and stuff. However, mother is not hurtful towards focus child.

Child loves her mom so much, she never treats her mother differently...They love their mother...she hurts them...Her mom is making her feel pain that she shouldn't have to feel. She curses and screams at her for no reason. Too many blows from your mother crushes your spirit.

Child has no contact with mother...She runs from her mother whenever she sees her. She refuses to talk to her or be around her at all. It's like she's afraid of her.

One caregiver reported that the child said he does not love his mom because she won't feed him. When asked further about the relationship between child and his mother, this caregiver asked the child to speak to the interviewer to express himself. He stated that he did not love his mom because she didn't call him for his birthday and doesn't visit him. This child also indicated that his lack of contact with his mother also meant that he could not see his brothers who live with the mother.

Child-like, peer/sibling relationships. Some caregivers described the relationships between the child and parent as child-like, similar to relationships between peers or siblings:

Almost like child to child, "If he's watch TV- "I'm watching TV." She's immature; she plays with him a lot. They are like friends.

Because [bio mom] has the choice to be a part of her life and if she chooses not to, I can't...she knows she's her daughter, but she treats her more like a sister...her mother feels like that's her sister. That's her fault 'cause she can always pick her up on the weekends.

Relationship is improving. We do see what appear to be positive changes in relationships between some parents and children. During an early interview, one caregiver described the mother's lack of interest in her son in the following way: "She doesn't talk to or do anything with her son...He doesn't see her, so it's neither good or bad." During a later interview, the caregiver stated, "He loves being close to his mother. They get along great." A similar shift

seems to have occurred in another family. The caregiver said during one interview, “He talks to her and loves her, but she doesn’t give him the kind of attention he needs,” yet in later interviews stated, “He loves being with his mother. They have a good relationship...really loves his mother and she shows favoritism toward him.” In the initial interview another caregiver described her poor rating of this relationships like this: “Because [focus child] is afraid of his mother,” but in a later interview stated, “It’s good, could be better, but it’s good. He’s more willing to go with her. He knows her now.” Yet another caregiver described a poor relationship between the mother and child in the initial interviews, linking this assessment to the mother’s drug abuse:

Because a lot of times when [child] was with her, she spent little time to no time with her...Her mother is on drugs, so how much of a mother-daughter relationship can they have. But they do love each other.

In later interviews she indicated an improvement in this relationship: “It’s good. She loves her mother and sometimes she wants to be with her.”

Other caregivers described improving relationships between mothers released from jail or prison and their children:

Because they communicate with each other. [Focus child] shares good stories about her mom with me...The kids now visit her on weekends as where before they did not visit her in jail. [Focus child] has improved in school. [Focus child’s sibling in home] has begun daycare now...Because when they are around each other, they get along and [focus child] is happy to be with her mom.

Bond is beginning - mom returned four weeks ago after being away for three years.

Another caregiver describes the mother’s efforts to build a relationship with her child in this way: “Because when she was younger he really didn’t know her but she continued to come over and get to know him.”

One grandmother described a very good relationship between her daughter and grandchild that is improving because her daughter is maturing. The relationship is beginning to mature as well, from a sibling relationship to the beginning of a parent-child relationship:

Like sisters. They have secrets, laugh and giggle. They talk. They have a good relationship...because my daughter's a very understanding parent for her age. She knows kids are people too. The older she gets, the more patient she is. She tries to give her more independence...They get along really well. Their day is not made until they kiss and hug each other.

Relationship is deteriorating. Some caregivers told stories of deteriorating relationships between the mother and child:

Was very good, I think when he was living with her. Since May, which is when I've had [focus child] now living with me, he has had no contact.

Child hopes for a future with mother. Several interviewers paraphrased statements other caregivers made about children wanting to live with their mothers in the future. For example, one interviewer reported, "Child would like to live with his mother again...He loves his mother." One caregiver indicated that the children she cares for want to believe that their mother "will be their mother and come and get them." According to the caregiver, the focus child talks to her mother weekly and has a good relationship with her: "She loves her mother and wants to be with her but as she gets older she realize it may never happen." Another caregiver indicates that the child in her care thinks a great deal about her mother and looks forward to talking with her and spending time with her:

Because even though she is not with her she talks about her mom a lot. She talks to her on the phone, she asks for her and said she couldn't wait for her to come home...She loves her mother and looks forward to spending time with her. [Child] likes to be with her mother. She is eager to be with her...

Grief and loss. A number of children were described as having close relationships with their mothers before the mothers died. For example, when describing the relationship between

mother and child, one caregiver reported, “Before she passed it was very good because they were very close.”

Some children are mourning the loss of their parents who are alive but demonstrate little interest in the children. Interviewers described several caregivers’ descriptions of how strongly the children in their care miss and love their mothers and the mothers’ lower level of interest in the child:

He talks about her often and misses her...Because he knows, loves and misses his mom. He’s happy to see her when he does...Because he loves his mother...It’s a good exchange. Sometimes he expresses that he misses his mom...He misses her...he has a good rapport...he’s happy to see her. And even though it’s inconsistent...he always has strong desire to see her...although child “adores her”, the caregiver doesn’t feel that the biological mom reciprocates.

Because his relationship with her is that he adores her and likes to be with her. He is crazy about her...He thinks she is amazing and wonderful. I think she is not so nice to him though ...He’s crazy about her, but I think it’s a bizarre relationship. I call it the tennis match. It’s like old married couples...Um, she’s very impatient with him and she’s not interested in interacting with him except for rare occasions. He’s so crazy about her, that it’s like throwing a dog a bone.

One caregiver indicated that the relationship between the focus child and biological father was good and that she [the caregiver] “sees him every week”. However, this caregiver also indicated that due to his strong attachment to his father, the focus child experiences feelings of grief and loss following weekend visits with his father:

[Child] and his father have a great relationship. He cries when he comes back home from weekend visits with dad. He does not want to leave his dad.

Confusion. According to their caregivers, some children do not understand why their mothers behave in the ways that they do. Others indicate that the child has been told that the mother is actually an aunt or other family member:

She loves her as her auntie. She spends time with her and visits her mom. But she only knows her mom as her auntie.

He's respectful. He knows who she is as a person, but not as a parent. He knows her as family.

Father-child Relationship

Regular contact. When asked to describe the child's relationship with his or her father, a number of relative caregivers commented on the degree of contact between the focus child and biological father. One relative caregiver indicated that the child and her biological father "go out" and spend time together once or twice a month. "They go out together and she loves him.... She loves her dad and enjoys spending time with him. She sleeps over at her dad's home one to two times a month."

According to the interviewer, one relative caregiver indicated the focus child frequently writes letters to her father. The caregiver also explained that the father maintains a strong connection to his daughter, despite being incarcerated:

Relationship with father [is] very good, she sends a letter every day ... father calls 3 times per week. They have a very good rapport, because they communicate. They talk during visits every two weeks...They have an excellent rapport, considering that he's incarcerated. He does very good parenting her over the phone.

Another caregiver who also indicated that her son, the focus child's biological father, is incarcerated, pointed out that family members make certain that the child sees her father every week. This caregiver said, "My son is incarcerated at this time. However, family members take [focus child] to see him every week and she always enjoy seeing him."

Other caregivers indicated that the focus child and biological father spend a substantial amount of time communicating, going places and just spending time together:

She is learning to talk to him; they spend a lot of time together and go places together...because, um, he...when he does come around, he takes her places. He talk to her. Even though it periodic, he does spend time with her.

[Focus child] sees him every week... The dad takes him to the show (movies) once or twice a month... When he lived here the father took him out every weekend.

One relative caregiver who indicated that the biological father has daily contact with his daughter said, “Because he come by everyday or he’ll call. He buys her things she needs. He speaks positive things with her. He very strict on reading. He try to feed her knowledge.”

Irregular contact. Some caregivers shared that the focus child had irregular and limited contact with the biological father. One caregiver indicated that the biological father visits the focus child “sometimes each year.” The interviewer summarized the contact between the biological father and focus child by saying, “He sees his father maybe once a year, but dad never requests visits. Contact usually by coincidence.” Another caregiver indicated that the biological father has irregular contact with the focus child and the inconsistency makes it difficult for the father and son to establish a bond of any kind:

He comes around every so often. There’s no father-son connection... There should be a closer bond and there’s not... He’s not around enough to establish a good or bad relationship with [focus child].

Other caregivers shared that the biological father was incarcerated making it difficult for the child and father to have a relationship. One caregiver indicated that biological father “... has been in jail for more than two-thirds of her life.” Another relative caregiver stated, “...limited contact due to incarceration, not quality times when he does see him.” The caregiver also stated, “He doesn’t have a real concept of him bein’ his father.”

No contact. Several caregivers said that the focus child had no contact with his or her biological father at all. Some children had only spoken with their biological father once or twice in their lifetime. One relative caregiver indicated that there was no contact with the focus child’s biological father and that he hasn’t been heard from within the last two years. Another caregiver stated that the focus child’s biological father did not want the responsibility of being a father:

There is no contact with father... Children doesn't see their father...Don't wanna be a father.

Some caregivers explained that the focus child's biological father lived out of state and was not able to maintain a strong connection. The biological fathers of a number of children in the study were deceased. Two relative caregivers mentioned that the biological father was murdered.

Some caregivers did not know the biological father's whereabouts. A few caregivers noted that the focus child had never met his or her biological father. In some instances, neither the caregiver nor the focus child knew who the biological father was, or they did not know the biological father very well. A relative caregiver indicated that the biological mother has yet to reveal the biological father's identity to the focus child and her grandparents. According to the interviewer, this caregiver reported:

Unknown to grandparents; mother will not talk about him...Mother never told child about her father until this year. Then she only gave her his name. Mother and child ran into father at Walgreen's, but the mother did not tell daughter at that time.

Another relative caregiver who indicated that the biological father's identity was unknown indicated that the focus child believes that the caregiver's spouse is her biological father. However, this caregiver identified the importance of knowing the child's genetic history but described how the parent's account of her own history constantly fluctuates.

A grandfather raising his grandchild indicated that the biological father has no contact with his granddaughter and that his whereabouts are unknown said the following:

I don't know the bum. He is missing in action. He's never been around...I'm her father in her eyes. No contact - he's a loser...Nowhere to be found.

Positive relationship. When asked to describe the child's relationship with the biological father, a number of relative caregivers identified positive feelings and interactions. A relative

caregiver indicated that the relationship between the focus child and biological father was good and that the focus child was always happy to see her father: “She’s always happy to see him too...it is good, whenever she can see him.”

Several caregivers indicated that the focus child was happy to see the biological father and enjoyed spending time with him:

Child is happy to see her father when he visits her...Good, no complaints.

Because when they see him they’re very happy.

She always says she loves her daddy. She loves her dad and enjoys spending time with him.

She loves her father. Loves spending time with her dad, they have a very good relationship.

Two boys look just like father and they are very close... Like I said, they love their mother and father... They both love their father too... He’s crazy about his dad and looks forward to being with him.

[They] play together and happy to see him...Sees him and kisses and hugs him...He loves his father and enjoy being with him.

One relative caregiver described how the focus child becomes excited whenever he sees his father, “He gets so excited when his father is around.” Another caregiver indicated that the focus child thinks the world of her biological father and wants to live with him:

Child feels like her dad is the world. No one can say anything bad about him...She’s crazy about her father. She would like to live with him.

One caregiver indicated that the focus child and biological father are getting closer and have become more affectionate with each other.

She is learning to talk to him; they spend a lot of time together and go places together. He gives her plenty hugs and kisses...because they all close. [Focus child] is getting used to him again - she is opening back up to him. They show affection.

A relative caregiver indicated that the focus child likes spending time with his father “because he thinks his dad is the bearer of gifts and entertains him.” This caregiver also indicated that the son enjoys spending time with his father, even though their time together is limited and the father seems to lack appropriate parenting skills.

One on one it is very good. But as far as how often they see each other, it should be more...He doesn't see his father very often, but when they're together they enjoy each other's company...Um, [focus child]'s very accepting and the attention his dad does give him is appreciated. I think he has no parenting skills, but he tries. He's very proud of [focus child], yet he has a lot of limitations.

A relative caregiver indicated that despite the biological father's incarceration, the focus child and father truly love one another. This caregiver also indicated that the focus child prefers to be with her father, rather than her biological mother. This caregiver was reported as saying:

She loves her father and she would rather be with father than mother...Even though he is incarcerated. She loves him. She loves her dad... The love he has for her is a true love. He truly loves his daughter.

A relative caregiver indicated that the focus child and siblings are happy to see the biological father. Nonetheless, this caregiver also indicated that the children suffer from anxiety, which is believed to be associated with the father's previous abandonment. This caregiver said, “Children happy to see their father... They have a good relationship with their father but they are anxious about him leaving them again.”

Another relative caregiver indicated that despite the biological father's alleged drug use and very limited involvement, the focus child is happy when she sees him and enjoys spending time with him. This caregiver stated, “She is always happy to see her father and enjoy being with him...He don't spend no time with her. I think he on the drugs too.... The times that she does see him they get along well.”

Some caregivers identified the biological father's limitations but recalled that he made a good effort to be involved in the focus child's life. One caregiver indicated that despite the biological father's inability to provide for his daughter, he spends time with her and is a good father: "Her father is a good father, but is not a provider. He spends time with them." Another caregiver shared that the biological father, who lives out of state, has a good relationship with his son. This caregiver also described how the father provides financial support and bonds with his son.

Because his dad calls him and sends him gifts. He has been helpful... His dad lives out of state, but [focus child] will go see him for two weeks in summer. Because he seems to be able to relate and talk to him... He has contact with his son, he helps financially and shows interest in his son... Good relationship, knows him.

Negative relationship. When asked to describe the child's relationship with the biological father, a number of relative caregivers described negative feelings and interactions. Some caregivers identified the biological father's limited or poor parenting skills, lack of involvement in or negative influence in the focus child's life. One caregiver said, "It's just poor-very poor." Another indicated that the focus child did not like her biological father and does not want to have contact with him. The reasons this caregiver gave were:

When [focus child] was ten years old, her daddy tried to play with her, touch between her legs. I think that really messed with her. [Focus child] been in counseling ever since she was 6 or 7...She doesn't like him because he smokes, drinks, and is not involved in her life. Daughter doesn't want to be near him.

Some caregivers discussed the father's lack of involvement and influence in the focus child's life. Several caregivers noted that the biological fathers made promises that they didn't keep:

They love their dad, but dad does not come around and doesn't keep promises.

He promises things that he can't do.

He make her promises and do it or don't do it and leave her hanging without explainin'. He wants to jump in here, after bein' incarcerated, and play Dad.

Another relative caregiver indicated that the focus child was very angry with her biological father for not fulfilling his promises or maintaining contact with the family. This caregiver quoted the child as saying,

[Child] chewed him out over the phone. She was very arrogant, saying, 'You keep lyin' to us...'. This focus child also said, 'You don't call us, you don't come see us, you could do better'.

Another relative caregiver indicated that the focus child desires more time with his biological father, but the father no longer has contact with the child: “Well, I know [Child] wants to spend more time with him, but he doesn't...Right before Christmas he stopped coming around.”

Quality of Relationship between Caregiver and Child

Although they were not asked during the interview to identify or describe their relationship with the focus child, caregivers discussed a wide variety of feelings, attitudes and relationship dynamics with respect to the child(ren) they were caring for. The range of feelings, attitudes and relationship dynamics included positive and negative relationships, strong and weak bonds between the caregivers and the children in their care. In some cases, the interviewer summarized the caregiver's comments regarding his or her relationship with the focus child; the descriptions provided by the interviewers are not direct quotes from the caregivers. The interviewers also included their own comments and perceptions describing the caregivers' relationship with the children in their care.

Strong Positive Relationships

Based upon interviewers' reactions to interviews, several caregivers appeared to have strong attachments to the relative's child(ren) they were caring for and the children appeared to be attached to these caregivers:

...She and her niece appeared bonded and expressed affection toward one another during the interview. Focus child read a poem that acknowledged how she "found her blessing" in her aunt/caregiver/ "mother." This family unit of two appears strong, resilient and very successful, despite the stressors they've encountered.

Caregiver is raising a child with special needs. Amazingly caregiver is able to focus on the child's strengths and not her challenges. Caregiver expresses a great deal of love for this child... Caregiver expresses a great deal of love and patience in her voice when speaking about [focus child]. [Focus child] has cerebral palsy (non-verbal, non-ambulatory) yet caregiver feels they communicate and has forged a bond.

The grandson was extremely fond of this grandmother. The bond in their relationship is evident. Grandmother wants best for her family and it is apparent in her effort and attitude... The child and parent were very affectionate with each other. The minor went up to the caregiver many times to hug her...[Focus child] would not socialize with anyone else in the home, including bio mom during the interview.

Some interviewers' comments and some caregivers' statements indicated that the bond that caregivers had with the children in their care was similar to the bond a biological parent might have with a child:

It is strange cause I didn't biologically birth him. I consider it a blessing. I have a lot of love to give and share. Sometimes I wish I had my freedom and privacy back. I am not gonna deny that I may be in this for the long haul. We are very attached to each other.

I love my niece dearly; like she's my own...I have no regrets...

[Focus child] is like another son to me. I don't have any problems because he has been around me since birth.

One caregiver indicated that she thought the related child in her care had positive feelings about their caregiver and the caregiver's feelings and commitment toward her:

...I think she's generally happy with me. I don't think she'd want to be anywhere else. I know that she knows I love her and will always take care of her.

Other caregivers described their love for the children and the joy that they experience caring for these children:

I love my grandchildren, they make me laugh... My grandchildren give me a joy that no one else can give. It's a special kind of love. I'm glad to be a grandma.

He's a joy to have. I'm glad we're able to take care of him.

One caregiver described how close she felt to the children while at the same time understanding that she cannot replace the mother:

Hmm... It's a hard job - a very hard job. As much love as you have for the children, there is always the question. There's always that void. Why wasn't Mom there? You could never take the place of Mom. You know 100% that Mom will always be first. There's a special bond between child and birth parent. Grandma is always a little less than first. The void is still there for all four. The worst part is, they will leave you some day. You actually feel that you are their actual Mom. It hurts, 'cause you know you are second and you'll never be first. In my old age, I know they'll be there for me. They have a very, very special place in my heart. I don't feel they're just my grandchildren; I feel they're my children. No matter how much love and attention I give them, Mom is always on their mind. They love me, but she's mommy...I thank God that our arrangement is as it is. I love them so much. I'm in this for life. There's no anger. They have two homes. I can't even think of them not bein' here.

Interviewers shared their observations and inferences about caregivers, describing their dedication to the children and very positive feelings that many caregivers express about their relatives' children:

Caregiver easily expressed loving feelings toward granddaughter.

She speaks fondly of her grandchildren and seems to enjoy the role she's playing in their life.

She expressed continued dedication and unconditional commitment toward her grandson.

This caregiver seemed to care for her grandchildren deeply. She's trying to access all available resources for them. During the interviews, she displayed a great deal of patience and understanding in regard to their behavior.

The caregiver expressed herself very positively in regards to her granddaughter. She said she was a total joy and there was nothing negative she could say about her.

Caregiver speaks fondly of her grandson and he seems to be a source of joy for her... Caregiver expressed affection for her grandson and stated that she really enjoys his company. She is used to having him around - he's been with her since he was seven months old.

Children as “Blessings” and “Gifts”

A number of caregivers described caring for their relatives' children as rewarding and beneficial. Some caregivers were grateful for the opportunity to raise their relative's child. They viewed the children in their care as “blessings” and “gifts”:

It's just like raising your own kids. If it wasn't for my grandkids I don't think I wouldn't be here. I just can't take care of them financially. They keep me going when I feel like giving up.

[Focus child] has been a lifesaver to me. She helped mend my body and keep me sharp mentally. It's been a saving grace. I think it's been pretty good...

For me, it's a good thing. I enjoy helping her. Thanking God for sending her when her mother passed. She's a gift. I don't think I would a made it without her. She's a special gift. I really don't think I'd a made it without her - selfish, but true.

Give the children lots of love and you will get it back. I love my grandson and enjoy raising him... Sometimes people might think that raising a grandchild is a difficult task. I thank God for [focus child]. He's been a blessing in my life. He keeps me active, etc... Being a caretaker, a mother, a grandma, it takes a lot of time and energy, love and affection and most of all patience. Knowing that one day this child, male or female, will grow up and you can accept some of the credit for the up bringing of this child. That's about it.

Frustrating yet Close and Caring Relationship

According to the interviewer, one caregiver was frustrated and overwhelmed with caring for a relative's child, yet had a close and caring relationship with the child:

The child called the caregiver "mom" even though she knows she is truly her aunt. The caregiver appears to have a close relationship with the child although she admits that she gets frustrated sometimes because her niece demands a lot of attention.

Despite various challenges, caregivers identified some very positive feelings about the relative's child(ren) in their care:

Well, I love her...sometimes it can get stressful at time. She's at that vulnerable age.

It gets frustrating at times. [Child] is uh, he's worth it. He's a sweetie pie.

Difficulty Connecting with Children

A few caregivers did not appear to have close bonds with the children they were caring for. Some caregivers were frustrated with the responsibilities of raising a relative's child, making it difficult to feel connected to the child in their care:

Caring for someone else's child is difficult. No connection with child. [I'm] angry at child's parent because they are not doing what they are supposed to do and I take it out on the child. I am dealing with someone else's problem. I am taking on baggage of the bio-parents. I have to count the cost of caring for the child. It is hard when you don't have kids of your own, or when you don't have a partner.

Yes it's different than raising your own. I've found it was easier for me to feel closer to my own children. I guess because it's expected. My grandchildren on the other hand, even though I love them, I don't always feel as close to all of them the way I think I should.

One interviewer described efforts a caregiver was making to ensure that the children's needs are met and to strengthen her relationships with her grandchildren:

Caregiver seemed involved in the children's lives. She's making sure they get the services she feels they need and advocate for them at their school. She's making an effort to form closer relationships with her grandchildren, especially the

middle child. She admits she's not very close to him, but she's attempting to work on their relationship and make improvements.

Assuming Responsibility and Ensuring a Positive Future

Several caregivers described the additional responsibility of caring for relatives' children and their role in ensuring a safe and successful future for the children they were raising. One caregiver in particular described why she tries to keep the child in her care involved in positive activities:

It's, ya know, it's not that your life stops, but there's more responsibility. You just want to protect them so much. I feel like I'm the only one she has. I don't think anyone will love her as much as I do... [Child]'s starting ballet Saturday. I'm trying to her involved in positive things.

One caregiver talked about the hopes she had for the child in her care:

I want it to work for him. Now he has rules; before he didn't have them. I want him to be happy. He needs to have them. I want him to have an education.

During an interview with one relative caregiver, the child that she was caring for joined the interview and praised the caregiver and expressed gratitude for her aunt's love and support. This child's comments portray the respect that she has for her aunt and demonstrates how clearly this child understands the aunt's commitment to her well-being:

She's loving, caring, very creative...Anything she does, she doesn't give up. She keeps trying and she teaches me the right things... She's fun. She's in the shoes and in the place of my mother. She's responsible. She's loveable.

Summary and Conclusions

Caregivers reported considerable variability in the frequency of their contact with the parents of the children in their care and the frequency of contact between the parent and their children, ranging from no contact to daily contact. Roughly 20% of caregivers reported no contact with the mothers and a slightly higher percentage of caregivers and mothers reported

daily contact. Approximately 50% of caregivers had no contact with the father and 5% (wave 1) to 11% (wave 2) of caregivers had daily contact with the fathers. Frequency of contact between the children and their parents was similar to the frequency of contact between the caregivers and parents.

There is also considerable variability in caregivers' ratings of the quality of these relationships. Over one-third of caregivers rated their own relationship with the focus child's mother as very friendly with no conflict or only minor conflict. Nearly as many caregivers rated their relationship with the child's father in the same way. Eleven (wave 4) to 17% (wave 1) of caregivers categorized their relationship with the mother as not friendly with some or much conflict and between 5% (waves 2, 3, 4) and 9% (wave 1) of caregivers described their relationship with the father in this way. Some caregivers expressed frustration with the parents' drug use or other problems that prevented them from assuming the role of the child's primary caregiver. Other caregivers praised the parents for their efforts to deal with challenges they faced (e.g. progress made in drug treatment) or their involvement in their children's lives, their love for their children, etc. Many caregivers expressed their own disappointment, frustration and sometimes anger with parent for disappointing children or failing to assume responsibility for the children. Others feared that the parents might take their children back and not adequately care for them. Caregivers often expressed understanding of the challenges faced by the parents related to substance abuse, mental health, or becoming a parent at a young age.

Many caregivers described how important the parents are to their children and seemed to honor and encourage this relationship. These caregivers provided detailed examples of the positive aspects of the parent-child relationship. It is interesting that caregivers identified positive aspects of the parent-child relationships even when the caregiver seemed to hold out

little hope that the parent would assume primary caregiving responsibility for the child. While frequent contact between parents and children was often associated with positive relationships, this was not always true. Some parents were described as maturing and demonstrating increasing responsibility for their children, while others were described as having child-like relationship with their children, similar to peers or siblings. Caregivers described a role reversal in some relationships, with children worrying about their parents and in some ways acting as the parents' caregivers. A number of caregivers mentioned that the children missed their parents greatly and the parents of some of these children took little interest in them. Some children were openly angry with their parents and confronted them about their failure to do the things necessary to assume care of the children. Other caregivers described the children's feelings toward their parents as neutral or ambivalent.

Many caregivers also discussed their own relationships with the children. Many caregivers described strong, positive relationships with the children, some going so far as to describe the children as blessings or gifts. Others described the relationship as close and caring, while also frustrating and overwhelming at times. A few caregivers indicated that it was difficult developing close bonds with the relatives' children. Others described the additional responsibility they have assumed in relationship to their own hopes and dreams for the children and their commitment to ensuring a positive future for them.

Results presented in this chapter suggest that risk factors for children in kinship care include absent or strained relationships with birth parents and relationships with relative caregivers that are not close, as well as conflict between the children's parents and relative caregiver. On the other hand, positive relationships with birth parents, combined with frequent contact, and friendly relationships between the parents and caregiver may be protective factors.

We have not empirically tested these assumptions in this study in any detailed manner. However, preliminary analyses do suggest that conflict in the parent-caregiver relationship is associated with higher levels of caregiver stress. In future analyses we will examine the potential protective effects of parent-child and parent-caregiver relationships in relationship both to child and caregiver outcomes.