

Minimizing Trauma During Trial Placements

A Model for Humane and Effective Resolution of Conflicting Legal and Emotional Realities in Certain Trial Placements



At its worst, when any placement is disrupted:

- No one gets out unscathed
- Some disruptions are more damaging than others

There are No Villains

There is Conflict
Between Systems
And the Values They
Represent

Children x Conflict
=
Big Problem

Minimizing Trauma During Changes in Placement

- ◎ Every Situation, Every Child is Different
- ◎ Assess the Child's Attachments and their Fears
- ◎ Communicate Clearly and With Transparency in an Age Appropriate Manner
- ◎ Give the child and involved families as much information and control as possible.

Today's Focus is Very Specific

- ◉ Minimizing trauma during reunification efforts in situations where:
 - Children may have never lived with their biological parents and/or
 - Children are strongly attached in their foster homes and/or
 - Children have experienced neglect or abuse with their biological parents and have had no curative experiences with them

The Problem we are Trying to Prevent

Having a child know
Safety and Security

Then - Abruptly

Losing it

Contributing Factors

- ◉ The failure to clearly identify behavioral changes that would make a real difference in child care and safety
 - Treating important, yet extraneous issues
 - Mistaking treatment progress on extraneous issues as reflecting progress toward safe reunification.

Contributing Factors

- ◉ Believing that moving a child from their foster home to their biological parents' home is the best way to see if the placement will work.
- ◉ Ripping anything apart is destructive

A More Humane Alternative

- ◎ It is possible to step up supervised visitation to support both parents and children in a successful, reunification and to decrease the angst and grief of the foster family.

A Stepped System of Well Focused Visitation

- ◎ Use the principles of Signs of Safety
 - Identify “worries”
 - Articulate clearly what changes would alleviate those worries.
 - Develop a stepped plan that allows the family to gain and demonstrate competence that is focused and measurable.
 - Insure that the plan also allows the child to gain confidence and comfort

Parental Service / Treatment Plan

- ◎ Should relate directly back to jeopardy
- ◎ Should reflect careful articulation of what changes would make a difference
- ◎ Should not rely on traditional, client centered treatment methods to improve child safety
 - Parental work on trauma history may improve the parent’s quality of life, but it makes no difference regarding child safety or nurturance

A Resource to More Clearly Articulate Meaningful Focus for Treatment

- ◎ Parenting Skills Articulated
 - Research based
 - Clearly articulated
 - Helpful starting place for the development of meaningful treatment goals

Clarity is Important

- ◎ Specific, measurable, attainable goals that make a difference in supporting child safety
- ◎ Specific description of criteria for moving visits to fading, and to bracketing
- ◎ Clear criteria and time frames for reassessment.

Why This is Less Traumatic

- ◎ The child stays in a safe, known situation while learning that his biological parents can care for and nurture him.
- ◎ The parents have a step-by-step, transparent process to learn. They can make clear choices.
- ◎ Foster parents can see the result of parental improvement. They can nurture and care for the child in the interim. They can participate in the process and see that the child they love is alright