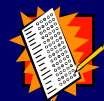




Module 1

Understanding the Foster Care System



Test Your Knowledge

- Involvement in the child welfare system typically begins through a report of suspected child neglect or abuse. **(T/F)**
- The two most common types of foster care placements are court-appointed foster care with non-relatives and group home placements. **(T/F)**
- The ultimate goal of foster care is family reunification when feasible. **(T/F)**
- Permanency planning is initiated after a child has been in the foster care system for 12 months. **(T/F)**



Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Identify at least three major types of foster care placement.
- Understand the goals of foster care, including identifying three desired discharge outcomes.
- Understand the steps involved when a child enters the foster care system.
- Name at least 3 major players involved in the foster care systems and discuss the roles that they play.

What is Foster Care?

- Foster care is one aspect of the child welfare system.
- Objectives of the foster care system include:
 - Provide short-term out of home care for children.
 - Provide services to the child's family to help them reduce the risk of future neglecting or abuse in preparation for the child's return home.

What is the Main Goal of Foster Care?

- Foster care is meant to be a *temporary* living situation.
- Goal is to provide support and care for the child in order to reunite children in foster care safely with their birth family.
- If reunification is impossible, the goal is to find the child in foster care a "permanent family" (e.g., adoption).



National Statistics for Youth in Foster Care

- About 513, 000 children and youth are in foster care across the U.S.
- A trend is that more children are entering the system than are exiting the system
- Amongst the children who are currently placed, there are approximately 20,000 children who will emancipate or age out of the system this year

Maryland Statistics for Youth in Foster Care

- In 2007, there were over 2,800 foster homes and 11,063 children were in foster care
 - 51% boys
 - 49% girls
- Average age was 7 years old
- Majority of children & youth in foster care are school-aged

More Maryland Statistics for Youth in Foster Care

- Average length of time in foster care for children in 2003 was 48 months
- 41% of the young people leaving the system in 2003 were reunified with their birth parents or primary caregivers
- In 2007, 28% of youth living in out-of-home care were residing with relatives
- In 2003, 56% of children in foster care were adopted by their non-relative foster care parents and 40% were adopted by relatives



Brainstorming Activity

- Discuss the different scenarios in which a child may be referred to foster care.
 - Is foster care ever a voluntary option for caregivers? Why might this be?

Different Reasons for Youth to Be Placed in Foster Care

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Neglect or abandonment
- Domestic violence
- Drug abuse
- Long-term financial instability
- Caregivers' long-term illness or hospitalization.
- Caregivers' incarceration

Is Foster Care Ever a Voluntary Option?

- Yes, occasionally
- Examples:
 - Primary caregivers are absent on a short-term basis due to reasons beyond their control (e.g., hospitalization, incarceration)
 - Child needs a level of services that the family cannot provide (e.g., behavioral problems requiring specialized treatment)

Who Are the Key Players In the Foster Care System?

- Foster care parents
- Biological families
- Caseworker



About Foster Care Parents

- Foster parents can be:
 - married couples, single or divorced individuals
 - young or old
 - work outside the home or at home
 - have young children, older children, or none
- Requirements to be a foster care parent varies by jurisdiction and there is certain criteria to become licensed foster care parents
- Foster care parents usually receive monetary reimbursement and/or other benefits to alleviate the costs for childcare

Role of Biological Families

- Receive services while their child or children are in foster care
- Goal of services is to improve their ability to care for their child or children's physical and social-emotional needs in order to be reunified

About Case Workers

- Typically a master's-level social worker who provides:
 - Case management
 - Clinical intervention
 - Permanency planning
 - Reunification support
- In addition, a bachelor's level social worker may provide:
 - Mentoring
 - Crisis intervention
 - Therapeutic support

Major Types of Foster Care

- Court-appointed foster care
- Kinship care
- Group homes/ Therapeutic group homes
- Emergency foster homes

Court-appointed Foster Care

- Caretaking of children displaced from biological parent(s)
- Typically by a caring adult who has met the requirements to be a foster parent by their local jurisdiction.
- Temporary situation

Kinship Care

- Caretaking of children displaced from biological parent(s), typically by grandparents or other relatives.
- Kinship care is considered least detrimental because it improves stability and keeps displaced children closer to their extended families, neighborhoods and schools.
- Child welfare agencies increasingly are turning to kinship care for children in need of out-of-home placements..

Group Homes and Therapeutic Group Homes

- Similar to dormitories
- Usually a placement option for pre-teens and teenagers.
- Children and adolescents may be placed in group homes for the following reasons:
 - a shortage of available foster families
 - have difficulty in a foster family setting
 - have emotional or behavioral problems that are better met in a group home environment.

Emergency Foster Homes

- Available 24 hours/day to provide care until the social services system can determine a longer-term solution.
- These may be utilized when a child:
 - is in danger of serious harm or injury.
 - needs short-term placement until screenings are completed for kinship placement.
 - has crisis in foster home and needs an immediate new placement.

Process of a Child Being Placed in Care

- Involvement with the child welfare system typically begins with a report of suspected child neglect or abuse.
- Reports are investigated and if substantiated, a course of action is determined.
- Dependent on severity of risk, the child may be placed with other family members or in a foster home.

What Happens After the Child is Placed in Foster Care?

- Foster care caseworker conducts an initial intake session and develops an individual service plan.
- Then creates a permanency plan with goals for the child and birth family.
- Initial medical assessment will occur within 5 days of placement.
- Mental health referral is made if needed.

Department of Human Resources (DHR)

- DHR conducts a family team meeting with family members, caregivers, relevant community members and youth to discuss a plan for treatment and placement.
- Meetings occur at 3 time points:
 - After the initial referral
 - During placement transitioning
 - Anticipation of reunification with birth family

Possible Mental Health Concerns

- In addition to abuse or neglect they have previously suffered, children in foster care experience a great deal of emotional stress as a result of being removed from their homes.
- About 30% of children in foster care have severe emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems.

Common Mental Health Issues for Youth in Foster Care

- Anger/Irritability
- Nightmares
- Distressing memories
- Sleep problems
- Depression and Anxiety
- Avoidance
- Attention problems
- Problems with attachment
- Delinquency
- Oppositional Behavior



How Can the Key Players Help?

- It is important for caregivers and caseworkers to be aware of possible mental health issues, and to know how to seek help for these issues.
- Foster care caseworkers should collaborate with mental health providers within the school or community in order to address and treat children's mental health needs.



Group Discussion Activity

- Is family reunification always a good goal? What are the pros and cons of this approach? For example, what do you think about children who have been abused or neglected being returned to their biological parents?
- What kinds of challenges face a child who is aging out of foster care? How do you think that the foster care system could best prepare a child for this eventuality?

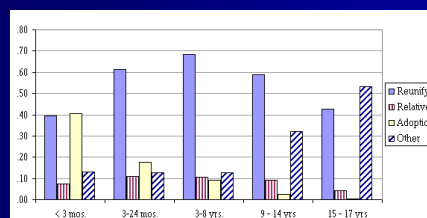
Permanency Planning

- Permanency planning is initiated as part of the foster care process to ensure the shortest length of stay and to develop a plan for permanent home placement in concert with the family.
- The goal is always reunification with the birth family.
- In Maryland, the goal is to place all foster children into a permanent living arrangement within a maximum of 15 months from the date they entered foster care.

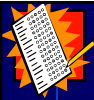
Typical Outcomes for Children After Foster Care

- Reunification with caregivers
- Adoption by foster care parents or outside of the foster care system
- Discharge to independent living

Department of Health and Human Services: Foster Care




Retrieved from:
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fostercare-reunif01/figB1.gif>



Re-Test Your Knowledge

1) Involvement in the child welfare system typically begins through a report of suspected child neglect or abuse. **(True)**

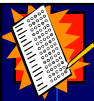
Explanation: Although some children enter the foster care system voluntarily (e.g., primary caregivers are absent on a short term basis, child needs intensive services), most children enter foster care system because they have been physically or sexually abused, neglected, or abandoned; have witnessed domestic violence; or their caregiver is incarcerated.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

2) The most common type of foster care placement is court-appointed foster care with non-relatives. **(False)**

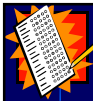
Explanation: Most children in foster care are placed with either foster parents or relatives ("kinship care"). Some may be placed in group homes.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

3) The ultimate goal of foster care is family reunification when feasible. **(True)**


Explanation: The goal of foster care is always reunification with the child's birth family.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)


4) Permanency planning is initiated after a child has been in the foster care system for 12 months. **(False)**

Explanation: Federal law requires the court to hold a permanency planning meeting *within* 12 months of the child's placement, and every 12 months thereafter. Maryland's DHR dictates that permanency planning begins when the child comes into foster care. Permanency planning meetings or hearings involves the child, the biological family, the caseworker, and sometimes the court.



Moving Towards Action

- Brainstorm how you might be able to put the information you learned today into action.



Practical Resources

- Factsheet about how the Child Welfare System Works:
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.cfm>
- Facts on Foster Care for Families, from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:
http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/foster_care

Practical Resources (cont.)



- Maryland Statistics on Children in Foster Care:
<http://www.fostercaremonth.org/AboutFosterCare/StatisticsAndData/Documents/MD-Facts-FCM07.pdf>
- National Statistics on Foster Care from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report10.htm

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