Today’s Focus:

• Who are our current foster parents?
• Promoting effective caregiving:
  Recruitment
  Screening
  Support
  Retention
Who are our current foster parents?
Caregiver Characteristics

- 40+ years
- Majority married
- (Rapidly growing single population)
- H.S. graduates
- 50%+ employed
- 40%+ African American
- 40%+ Caucasian
- Financially disadvantaged
- Health & MH similar to US population
Caregiver Characteristics

- 25% problems with empathy
- 20% clinically significant psych problems
- 20% age-inappropriate expectations
- Less cognitively stimulating than average US homes
- 40% dissatisfied with their parental role
Recruitment
How do we Typically Recruit Foster Parents?

- Word of mouth
- Bus stop advertisements
- Tax and utility bill flyers
- Brochures in doctor offices
- One church-one child
- Neighbor-to-family
- Family-to-family
What Message Do We Send?

- Every child needs a home
- Show me love so I can learn love
- Is there room at your table?
- Open hearts, open homes
- Make dreams come true
What do we know about Foster Parents’ Motivations?

• Want to make a difference
• Inspired by altruism or faith beliefs
• A personal identification with foster children’s circumstances
• “Empty nest syndrome”
Characteristics of Effective Foster Parents

- Flexible
- Teachers
- Members of a team
- Loving
- Family-centered
- Up for a challenge
Personalities of Effective Foster Parents

- Extroverted
- Agreeable
- Conscientious
- Emotionally stable
- Open
Behaviors of Effective Foster Parents

• Loving and nurturing the healthy development of a child
• Accepting the child as a full member of the family
• Advocating for the needs of the child
• Strengthening the child’s connection to the birth family
• Valuing the role of team member
• Knowing when to ask for help
Targeting Potentially Effective Foster Parents

• Where do we place our “brand?”
  – Bus stops?
  – Electric Bills?
  – Resource fairs?
• How long do we wait?
QUESTIONS?
Screening
Current screening strategies

- **Hard**
  - Smoke detectors
  - Fences surrounding pools

  Hard strategies are necessary but insufficient

- **Soft**
  - Home study

  Soft strategies may be sufficient, but they have measurement problems.
Better Strategies

- Use of parenting assessment scales
- Use of MH & emotional stability assessment scales
- Use of home environment assessments
- Use of personality assessments
Screening is essential if we expect to improve the quality of care for foster children.
What kind of caregiving are we looking for?
Foster parent role:
Familial
Bureaucratic
Parent Equivalent

• Unconditional care
• Unconditional love
• Intentional
• Responsive
• Proactive
• Engaged

Adapted from Lietz & Strength, 2011
Parenting +
Qualities of effective care

- Provide a safe and secure environment
- Provide a nurturing environment
- Promote educational attainment & success
- Meet physical and MH needs
- Partner with other members of team
- Promote social & emotional well-being
- Support cultural needs
- Support permanency
- Manage ambiguity & loss for the child
- Continuous professional dev’t
- Support relationships between children & family
Dimensions of effective caregiving

• **Affective characteristics**
  – Parenting with respect
  – Parenting with humility
  – Feeling toward the child as though she/he were one’s own
  – Parenting as emotional buffer
  – Selfless parenting

• **Behavioral characteristics**
  – Orienting the child to care
  – Strategies to ease the transition into family life
  – Intentional re-parenting
  – Advocating for the child
Qualities of caregiving

- Abilities
  - Attributes caregivers bring (naturally) to care

- Capacities
  - Qualities that can be developed or supported
Combining Dimensions and Qualities

- Affective characteristics
- Abilities
  - Can be screened

- Behavioral characteristics
- Capabilities
  - Can be trained / supported
QUESTIONS?
Training / Support
TRAINING PROVIDES INFORMATION
IT DOES NOT CHANGE BEHAVIOR
Models to improve the quality of foster care rely on intensive coaching.
QUESTIONS?
Retention
Top 10 Strategies to Retain Highly Effective Foster Parents
#1
Retention begins with your first interaction
#2 Foster parents must experience the mission in their ongoing interactions with social workers and other staff in the agency.
#3
Offer support for their daily practices
#4

Respond with support when they need it the most
#5

Embrace foster parents as team members
Use foster parents as an agency resource
#7
Publicly and privately affirm foster parents for their truly heroic work and their daily impacts on children and families.
#8
Develop learning circles
#9
Be transparent
#10
Be responsive
THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?
Selected References


Additional references


• Crum, W. (2010). Foster parent parenting characteristics that lead to increased placement stability or disruption. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 185-190.


