



Florida Guide for Analysis of Placement Stability

Prepared by:

Sharon Tintle, *Office of Family Safety*
Florida Department of Children and Families

In Collaboration With:

National Resource Center Consultants: Judith & John McKenzie, AdoptUsKids,
Lynda Arnold, Tom Hay & Gene Thompson, Organizational Improvement,
Janyce Fenton, Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning
Linda Johns, Office of Family Safety,
Florida Department of Children and Families
Kathi Guy, Jane Crittenden, Diane Rickman-Buckalew,
District 1, Florida Department of Children and Families,
Lynn Davis, Families First Network

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For children in the custody of the state, placement occurs after removal and is defined as the physical setting in which a child finds himself or herself while in out-of-home care or a substitute care setting, including shelter placements and trial home visits. The term “placement” designates the physical location that a child normally calls “home”. It does not necessarily refer to the place where a child sleeps on a given night. As such, under certain circumstances, a child’s short-term absence from a placement may represent a break – a temporary living condition – not a new placement.

A child may experience multiple placements while in out-of-home care. The federal measure counts the number of placements, or places the child has lived while in out-of-home care during a removal episode, including the current placement setting. A new placement results when the out-of-home care setting changes. For example, a new placement results when a child moves from shelter to a foster family home or to a group home or institution.

Placement stability is comprised of a complex set of variables including (but not limited to) the number of available foster home beds, placement matching policies, quality of care provided by the foster parents, agency licensing and relicensing policies, quality of communication and collaboration between foster parents, agency and caseworkers, services provided to the foster child, services provided to the foster parent, workers’ perception of foster parents role as partners, etc.

In past years, child welfare social workers have depended upon knowledge gained through accumulated years of experience and an extensive knowledge base of the families in the local geographical area. However, in today’s environment where there is an ever-changing workforce and populations are extremely mobile, accurate information cannot be exclusively based upon anecdotal information.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a step-by-step process that will assist in attaining a reliable picture based on data of child placement stability/instability, the quality of care provided to foster children and foster parents, and a picture of the number of foster homes in a specific area related to the number of children being brought into out-of-home care from that same area.

The process is four-phased:

- A. information gathering on a random sample of children in out-of-home care,
- B. information gathering on a random sample of active/inactive foster homes,
- C. interview process (“Appreciative Inquiry”) with agency and child welfare social workers, foster parents and community stakeholders, and
- D. analysis of the information gathered

This process is not meant to be conducted on a regular, monthly basis, but may be beneficial on a one-time basis in order to provide baseline data and an overall picture of

placement trends. However, the Local Recruitment and Retention Plans should provide an internal process for quarterly placement stability data analysis.

A. PHASE 1. Information Gathering on Children in Out-of-Home Care.

1. Set child sample size.
A sample of cases from the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS) client list is used to draw a representative sample of cases for review of children currently in out-of-home placement less than 12 months. Sample size and selection criteria is determined using the random sample size calculator at

<http://ewas.dcf.state.fl.us/asc/monitoring/calc.asp> OR

An over sample of 5 cases is routinely drawn in the event a case must be dropped from the review. The sample size confidence level tells you how sure you can be that your sample findings represent the whole population. It is expressed as a percentage. For example, a 95% confidence level means you can be 95% confident that the files you have examined represent what is contained in the total population of the files. A Sample Size Calculator is provided that will assist you in your sample size as well as the file number you need to draw for each record you are going to review. A random number table enables you to insure that there were no biases in the selection of files to be reviewed.

2. Collect child-related information:
 - a. *Length of Placements Information.* Create a template that will allow data entry of the total number of placements for each child selected for the review, average number of days of each placement for the child, information on timeframes of each child's individual placements in the current out-of-home care removal episode, and the specific reasons for the disruptions.

A sample template attachment has been provided that includes the necessary embedded formulas that allows entry and automatic calculations of the placement information data.

SEE ATTACHMENT– “Placement Stability Review Tools”, ([Child Placements Info](#), tab located at bottom of the template sheet.)

- b. Accessing several reports will be necessary to build a child placement history that will provide all the needed data.
 1. SACWIS Report: *Clients Active in Out-of-Home Care.* Provides number of total placements for each child's current removal episode, including the current placement.
 2. SACWIS Report: Client placement history screen on child will give length of time in each placement, provider, and reason for

placement end. (Because SACWIS Reason End Codes may be general, the specific reason for each placement end may need to be gathered from the foster parent, caseworker interview or the child's hard copy file.)

- c. Analysis of information gathered in this template should enable the determination of trends regarding placement changes including the point in time in the removal episode where placements are most unstable, stability/instability by placement types, unexpected trends in placement disruptions (examples - child placements for ages 0 – 3 are the most unstable; children are having three placement changes within the first 30 days following the initial removal, etc.). In addition, trends regarding systemic implementations necessary to decrease the number of multiple placements for foster children, (examples - trends regarding foster parents setting rules for “overnight only” placements; overcapacity licensing rules creating placement instability, etc.), should become evident.

3. Collect child demographic information.
This template will provide the following information on children in care: age, gender, race, county of removal, specific type abuse, child information provided to foster parents at placement (Yes/No), disabilities listed at initial removal (Yes/No, emotional, behavioral, learning), current disabilities (Yes/No, emotional, behavioral, learning), foster parent supports provided (Yes/No), siblings placed together, sibling/parental visits occurring regularly (Yes/No), other columns as needed.

Analysis of information gathered in this template should enable the determination of trends regarding the quality of care the child received during the removal episode.

SEE ATTACHMENT, Placement Stability Process Review Tools for sample template –Child Demographics tab located at bottom of template sheet)

Available Placement Stability Existing Reports:

Reference - March 10th 2005 Statewide Memo on Placement Stability from Beth Englander: Create an Internal Process Plan for local ongoing analysis of placement changes and identification of trends by geographic area. The data analysis process must result in descriptors specific to:

- Child's age, gender, race, ethnicity
- Number of placements by age group
- Placement Type (relative, foster care, non-licensed, group home, shelter, therapeutic)

- Reason for placement change. (Due to the general nature of the HSn reason end codes, a process to gather the specific reason should be generated.)

HomeSafenet Reports To track performance:

1. Placement Change Information.

To track performance: *Clients Active in Out-of-Home Care*. Acrobat Version.

- Provides number of total placements for each child’s current removal episode, including the current placement.
- Also gives percentage of <2 placements and >3 placements by Units and
- District average for length of stay (0 months to 48+ months) and median LOS for Unit and District.

b. Same report, (*Clients Active in Out-of-Home Care*), but printed in Excel, provides child specific listing by Districts.

- Can be sorted by number of placements for each child, placement providers, age of children, length of stay in current removal episode.

2. Child-specific descriptors. To track performance: HSn Report: *Demographics of Children Receiving Out-of-Home Services*. Provides children’s age, gender, race/ethnicity. Excel, by District.

3.. Significant trends or reasons for disruptions/placement changes. There is no HSn report regarding reasons for disruptions, and the HSn Case Notes often do not reflect the specific reasons. The child’s individual HSn *Placement History* page uses very general codes. Several Districts have designed specific placement reason tracking Excel spreadsheet systems.

In order for “analysis” to take place, the data produced in the reports must be examined for trends, followed by a statement of the findings. Converting the data into graphs and charts is useful in providing a picture of the findings. (Graphs and charts may be produced by selecting the data in the Excel spreadsheet and clicking on the CHARTS icon on the tool bar.) For examples of data analysis of graphs and charts, see pages 9 - 12 of this report.

Please incorporate data placement stability data analysis processes into your local District Recruitment & Retention plans.

II. Other Useful Reports.

- *DCF Performance Measure Dashboard*. You may access the Dashboard by going to the DCF Home Page, or http://www.state.fl.us/cf_web/, and clicking on the right hand menu item, *DCF Dashboard*. From this page, click on *Measures by Strategic Plan*. From this page, scroll down and click the box to the performance measure - *FS306. Percent of children with no more than 2 placements within 12 months removal*. This site will provide placement stability performance scores by Districts for the State Fiscal Year or Quarter. To see a chart of the data, click on the chart icon at the bottom of the graph. To see a drill down of the lead agencies for each District, click on the icon on the left side of the chart, beside each District.

- *Child's ZIP Code prior to placement.* There is not an existing report for this. However, if the licensing/R&R units would like to know this information for your District, you may contact me, and I'll get our Data Support unit to do an ad-hoc run for you.

III. Stability that Leads to Permanency

Counting moves only reveals instability. To produce the kind of stability that leads to permanency, managers & staff should focus on gathering data on six child-centered objectives.

- a. Placements are stable. To track performance: *Number of children who move from one placement to another in the last month.*
- b. Placements that have been stable for long periods must become permanent. To track performance: *The number of all children in care whose current placement is a family placement that has lasted 18 months or more.*
- c. Moves must promote permanency. To track performance: *Of those who moved from one placement to another in the last month, the % for whom the new placement was not a progression toward permanency.*
- d. Children rarely move. To track performance: *Of those who moved from one placement to another in the last month, the percent who have already had 3 or more placements.*
- e. Group Care should be therapeutic & temporary. To track performance: *The number of all children in care who have lived continuously in non-therapeutic group care for 6 months or more.*

Adapted from:

**Kennedy School of Gov't.
Harvard University.**

*"Stability in Foster Care
Measuring & Promoting Placements
that Lead to Permanent Homes"*

B. Phase 2: Information Gathering of Active/Inactive Foster Homes.

1. Set foster homes sample size. Suggest a random sample of 10 active family license files and 10 closed family license files within the current year.
2. Collect information regarding foster parent demographics, over/under capacity, reasons for closure, type home, how recruited, has the home been vacant for more than six months over the past year (Yes/No), current status of home (Active/Closed), and any other information you may wish to gather.
3. Create a spreadsheet with a row for each foster parent in the study, and a column for each type of information selected to be gathered by the study.
*Note: Information not available in the licensing files must be provided through personal contact with the foster parents and licensing counselors, or the child.

To track performance: create a spreadsheet that captures each foster family in study, and information collected in **Phase 2: 2.)** above.

SEE ATTACHMENT for sample template – Placement Stability Process Review Tools - (Foster Parents Demographics tab located at bottom of template sheet)

4. Information gathered on the number foster homes/beds by Zip Code and on children removed by Zip Code will provide a clear picture of the number of licensed foster beds available in the areas of initial removal for the children coming into care within each geographic area in your local area.

**Note:* Information on the number of foster home beds by Zip Codes should be available from the licensing units. However, since there is not a HSn report that provides the number of children removed by Zip Code area, a special ad-hoc report may be requested from DCF Central Office.

SEE ATTACHMENT – “Placement Stability Process Review Tools, Targeted Recruitment by ZIP Code. tab located at bottom of template sheet)

C. **PHASE 3: Interview Process.**

Placement stability and retention of foster parents are intricately entwined. If foster parents are appreciated as an important, crucial part of the foster care partnership process, there is a direct impact upon placement stability of the foster children they serve in their foster homes.

A comprehensive analysis of placement stability cannot be discerned solely from data. The information needed for the templates listed above may not be located in the case files, and quality of services and care may not be discernable from reading the files. Sometimes, due to a lack of documentation in SACWIS and the case file, the specific information regarding the reasons for placement end and services provided can be found only through inquiry. Therefore, there may be a need to consult with the case worker, foster parents or the child in order to find some of the missing pertinent information.

A questioning process called “Appreciative Inquiry Questions”, developed by John and Judy McKenzie of the AdoptUsKids National Resource Center is designed to be used in focus group settings comprised of foster parents, agency and department staff including child protective workers and supervisors, caseworkers, licensing and placement personnel, and community stakeholders. The inquiry generates beneficial discussion during the focus group sessions regarding positive practices and processes already working well in an attempt to build a local plan from a position of strength and positive energy that will enhance permanence among the foster parents, thus providing placement stability for the foster children.

SEE ATTACHMENT: “Appreciative Inquiry Questions

D. Phase 4. Analysis of Information Gathered.

Analysis of the information gathered during the “Appreciative Inquiry” focus group discussions, and from data in the templates, or spreadsheets, discussed above can be performed in several ways.

1. Data Entry. Data gathered will be recorded by entering the information into the template spreadsheets, or into tables. There are four separate spreadsheet templates provided to help you begin the data recording process.
2. Data and Information Analysis Examples.

Methods of analysis of template/spreadsheet data:

- Manual calculations of data in the spreadsheet may be utilized to perform the calculations required to analyze the data. However, using standard EXCEL formulas for these calculations is more accurate, and much less work intensive. [Four tools have been provided in an ATTACHMENT that include templates for the data entry of Child Placement Information, Child Demographics, Foster Parent Demographics and Targeted ZIP Code Information. The Child Placement Information template has embedded formulas that will allow for calculation of time periods for length of stay.]
- Pivot Tables can be created to summarize the data contained in the spreadsheets.
- Information can also be imported into an ACCESS database, allowing queries, or inventory of the information available, that will allow you to sort, display and print your information in many different formats. For example, information regarding the number of placement changes within the first 30 days of placement can be generated through an ACCESS query.

a. Child Placements Information.

Examples of analysis that may be created regarding placement stability include the following:

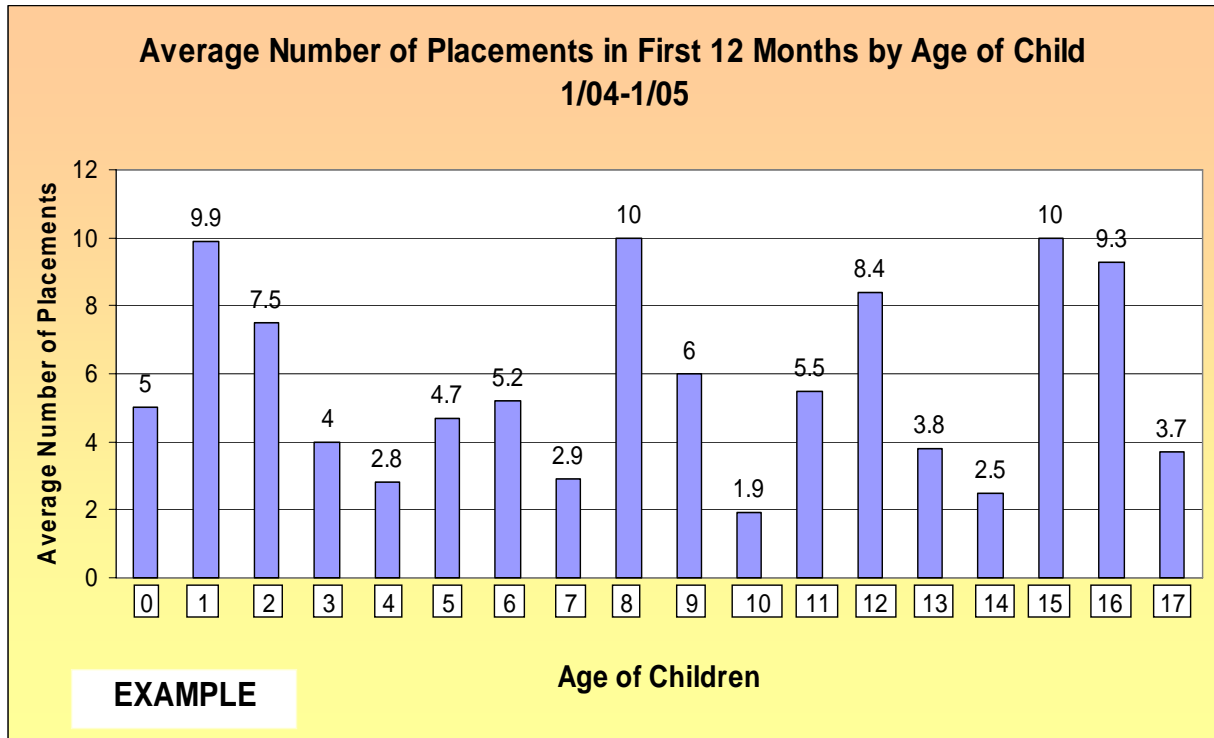
- 1.) Reasons for initial removal
- 2.) Average number of placements by months, and by age of child
- 3.) Average number of placements during the first 30 days of care following initial removal
- 4.) End reasons for disrupted relative placements
- 5.) Number of placements by placement type

The following are examples of charts and analyses from the Placement Stability Process Review Tools ATTACHMENT that includes the four template data entry tools:

Example Analysis - Child Placement Information Template: Average Number of Placements by Age During the 12 month period youth 13 to 17 years of age experienced an average of 5.9 placements during the first twelve months of care, thus experiencing the greatest level of placement instability. Children 6 - 12 years of age averaged 5.7

placements during the first 12 months of care. Placement stability is just slightly better for children 0 – 5 year of age, who averaged 5.6 placements.

The age breakdown of the children in this study included 39 children ages 0 to 5, 51 children ages 6 to 12, and 40 children ages 13 to 17.



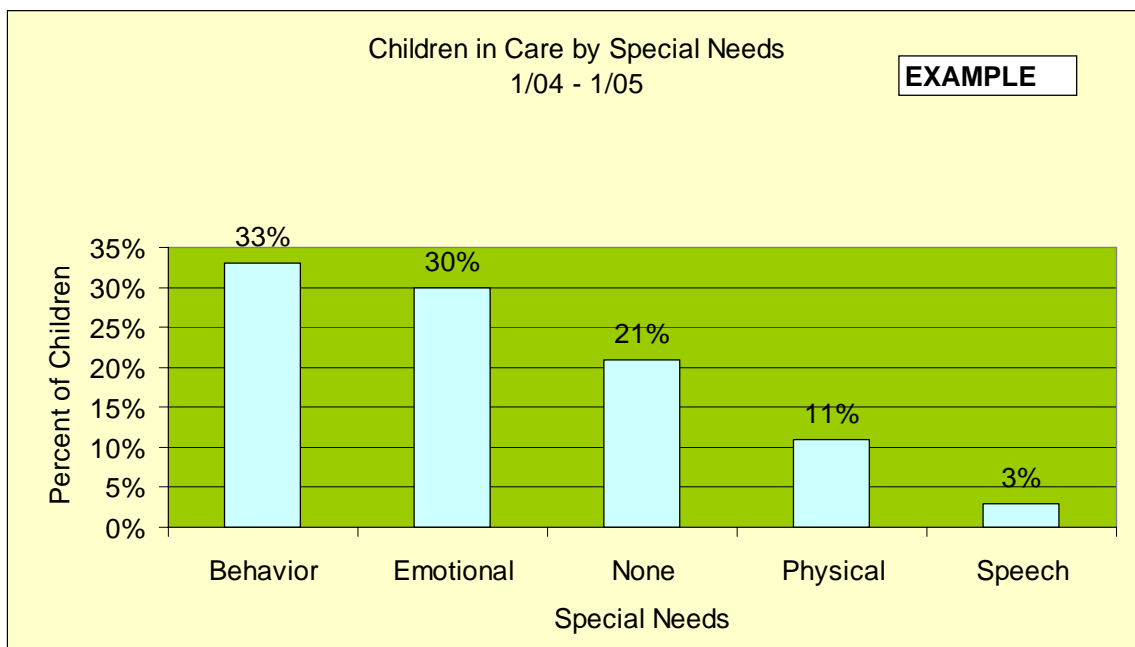
b. Child Demographics.

Examples of analysis that may be created regarding child demographics include the following:

- 1.) Children in care by gender, race, age, special needs
- 2.) Number licensed foster homes available by area contrasted with the number of foster children by area
- 3.) Percent of siblings not placed together

Example Analysis – Child Demographics: Children in Care by Special Needs.

During the course of the year, case notes reflected that children were exhibiting the following breakdown of special needs: 33% behavior, 30% emotional, 21% none, 11% physical and 3% speech. The special needs reflected below were not all diagnosed behaviors, but were reflected in the child’s case notes.

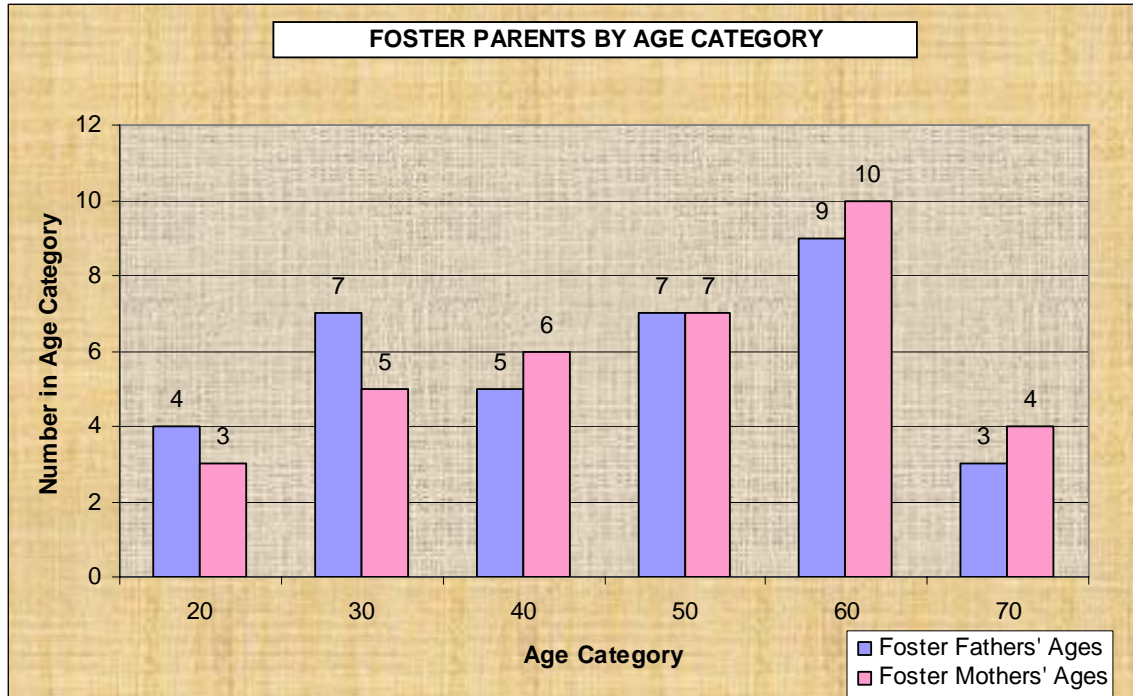


c. Foster Parents Demographics

Analysis Example 3: Foster Parents By Age Category.

This example shows that the greatest number of foster parents are in their sixties, followed by foster parents in their fifties. There are 35 foster mothers in the local area and 35 foster fathers.

EXAMPLE:



Example Analysis – Foster Parent Demographics Table: Foster Homes By County, By Race

Of the 20 families studied, 10 are Caucasian, and 7 are African American families, and 3 are other races. The breakdown of the Other Families includes 2 Spanish families and 1 Creole family.

EXAMPLE:

County	Caucasian Families	African-American Families	Other Families
County A	3	2	1
County B	4	0	1
County C	2	2	

County D	1	3	1
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d. Targeted Recruitment by Zip Codes

Examples of tables that can be created for analysis of foster home demographics include the following:

- Foster parents by recruitment effort types
- Foster parents by over/under capacity
- Foster parents by socio-economic status
- Foster parents by groups (military family, retired)
- Foster parents by race, age
- Specific reasons for closure

Example Analysis – Targeted Recruitment by Zip Code: Foster Homes by Zip Code Compared to Children’s Initial Removal by Zip Code.

- An ad-hoc report was generated in from SACWIS which included all the zip codes in the local district, and the number of children who were removed during the past year from each of the zip code areas. Another report listed all the foster parents of the local district by zip code. The two lists enabled a comparison of the number of children removed from each zip code with the number of foster family homes and available beds from each zip code.
- This type of analysis provides a clear picture of the specific areas where targeted recruitment efforts should be focused.

EXAMPLE:

ZIP CODE	Number Licensed Homes	Number of Beds Available in Licensed Homes	# Children Removed by ZIP Code Area
99439	1	2	90
99438	3	6	29
99457	3	5	11
99436	1	2	50
99455	1	1	24
99504	1	1	93
99503	14	29	82
99502	8	19	36
99501	15	34	206
99509	16	33	96
99506	12	25	103
99524	9	18	57
99526	13	26	61
99531	8	17	43
99532	10	19	46
99533	2	3	21
99354	9	22	116
99535	10	22	84
99549	2	2	22

Florida – Appreciative Inquiry Questions

1) Effective teamwork and collaboration – between public and private agency staff and agency staff and resource parents

The benefits of collaboration, communication and teamwork between people working for a common cause are immeasurable. Children in the foster care system are dependent on adults to protect and care for them. When there is productive and constructive dialogue and teamwork among public and private agency staff and between agency staff and resource parents (foster, adoptive and kinship parents), children and their families are much more likely to receive timely and effective services. As a result, all parties involved are able to experience a sense of accomplishment with the important mission they perform.

Questions

- a) Describe an experience when you were part of or observed an extraordinary example of teamwork and collaboration between the public agency and private agency staff? What made it possible? What was that like for you? What was your personal role in making this work?
- b) Describe a situation where agency staff and resource parents worked exceptionally well together? What was that like for you? What made it possible? What was your personal role in making this work? What can you or your agency do to insure that collaboration is an integral part of the system?

2) Placement stability as essential to healthy child development

All children need dependable nurturing relationships with committed, caring adults to survive and thrive. Placement stability is necessary for all children and youth in foster care to keep them physically and emotionally safe, to promote their healthy development and to achieve permanency as quickly as possible.

Infants and pre-school age children are especially at risk when they are moved frequently in foster care. Their healthy development depends on early attachment and bonding to a primary caregiver. Brain development research has shown that a secure attachment in the first year and a half of life is the foundation for developing critical personality components such as empathy and conscience. When a foster care placement must occur, infants are vulnerable to having this attachment and bonding process disrupted. They are less at risk if they do not experience multiple, short term placements. Providing children with positive placement experiences can enable them to grow up to be able to develop their own healthy relationships; to provide stability for themselves and their families; and to break the cycle of abuse and/or neglect.

Questions

- a) Describe a situation where you or someone you know really made a difference in maintaining a placement for a child? What made it possible? What made this special?
- b) What could you and/or your agency do to make this happen on a regular basis?
- c) If you could personally design a program to insure placement stability for infants and young children what would it look like? What would be the same? What would be different?

3) Effective retention and recruitment of foster and adoptive parents (resource parents)

Studies on successful recruitment efforts suggest that families who come forward are very mission driven, have thought about it a long time and/or are often influenced by other people they know who have been successful and satisfied with their experience as foster or adoptive parents. Having a good working relationship with the agency, feeling a sense of accomplishment and being able to access support services when they are needed can lead to higher satisfaction and retention of resource parents. Good retention practices support effective recruitment efforts.

Questions

- a) If you had 3 wishes for improving the satisfaction and retention of foster and adoptive parents what would they be?
- b) Tell us about the most effective recruitment program you have ever been involved with? What made it work so well? What was your role in making this a success?
- c) Describe how you personally were recruited to be a foster or adoptive parent? What was of standout importance in this experience?
- d) What did you and/or your agency do to maintain your interest from the first call until placement?

4) Positive partnering – of birth, kinship and foster/adoptive families

Caring for children once they are removed from their homes is a challenge for all communities. It is very hard work and involves extraordinary commitment from resource parents. The hard facts are that children feel more secure, loved and protected when the adults in their lives are working together as a team to provide care and plan for the child's best interests. Regular visiting between children, their parents, siblings and kin has been found to be the most important predictor that the family will be eventually restored.

When resource families support visiting schedules and encourage contact in everyday settings, such as family activities, school activities, etc., a more natural helping network can be maintained for a child. When agencies focus on training and supporting resource parents to partner with birth and kinship families, safer and better care can be provided to children and their families.

Questions

- a) Describe a situation that you were part of or observed where there was a strong partnership between the foster/adoptive parent and a child's birth parents. What did you do personally to make this work? How did it make you feel?
- b) What could you and/or your agency do to make this happen on a regular basis?