

## **FAMILY CONNECTIONS PROJECT YOUTH CURRICULUM A**

**Youth curriculum A is designed:**

- **for youth who are currently in the foster care system.**
- **for youth who are legally free.**
- **for youth with the goal of adoption or guardianship.**
- **to help youth understand that they can maintain family connections after permanency.**
- **for youth who desire to reconnect to relatives or other significant connections.**

## **ONGOING CONNECTIONS AND PERMANENCY PREPARATION FOR YOUTH**

### **PURPOSES/GOALS/OBJECTIVES OF PERMANENCY GROUP**

1. Identify the important connections that exist for youth.
2. Define family, foster care and adoption.
3. Assist youth in viewing the move to a family as a positive goal for themselves.
4. Help youth realize that their past is a part of their identity, and should not be forgotten. Assist in resolving feelings about self-identity in relation to prior experiences.
5. Help youth express their feelings, fears and fantasies concerning living in a family, and help them develop realistic expectations of family life.
6. Work with youth to integrate their past and their future by helping them understand that accepting a permanent family resource does not mean giving up connections to important people in their lives.
7. Explore recruitment options and assist youth in accepting some individual recruitment efforts.
8. Provide an atmosphere in which youth can feel free to express their feelings, questions and fears related to past, present and future connections/attachments.

## **LEADER OR CO-LEADER PREPARATION AND FOLLOW UP**

1. Determine the composition of the group, taking into account factors such as age range, developmental level, understanding of TPR/adoption, foster parents'/caregivers' acceptance of the plan and legal status of the youth.
2. Determine the number of participants you want to have in the group. An ideal group size is 10-18 participants; however you may conduct the group with as few as eight. Do not exceed 22 participants, as the group will become too large. With a larger group, you will not be able to give the necessary time to each participant and time management will become an issue.
3. Schedule a pre-session conference/contact with for each participant's worker.
4. Try to meet each participant personally prior to the first session.
5. Contact foster parents and explain the purpose of the group. Outline the content and discuss possible reactions that youth may have to the sessions.
6. Invite social workers to share their role in finding a family and preparing for the placement process. Please see pp. 22-23.
7. Co-leaders should meet prior to each meeting to plan the session, and immediately following each meeting to discuss what happened during the session.
8. Write meeting notes, file and distribute to the social worker for each participant. Discuss meeting notes with social workers, if necessary.
9. Either the co-leader or the social worker should obtain weekly feedback and input from the foster parents/caregivers.
10. Prepare a final written evaluation of the group.

## **GROUND RULES – HANDLING PROBLEMS**

1. As recommended in the outline, group participants will set ground rules; however, group co-leaders may need to add to these rules.
2. Be sure that group participants agree to abide by each ground rule as it is established.
3. Co-leaders should agree on consequences for breaking the ground rules. These consequences should be shared with the group and participants should either agree or help to revise, as necessary.
4. Keep the ground rules posted at each meeting and return to them should a problem arise.

## ADVANCE PREPARATION

(Total meeting time for Day One youth training: two hours)

(Total meeting time for Day Two youth training: two hours)

1. Locate a meeting site that is conducive to the group process and where there are no distractions from noise or activity. Privacy is important.
2. Prepare the room by bringing in any necessary supplies prior to the beginning of the session.
3. Make sure refreshments are available at each session.
4. Schedule a break midway through each session, but be sure to stress that the meeting needs to resume promptly after the break. You may want to set a kitchen timer so the group will know when to get back together.
5. You may also want to use the kitchen timer for activities to help adhere to the allotted times.
6. Ensure co-leaders will be present for all meetings. Do not begin the group process if co-leaders are not going to be available for all meetings. Consistency is very important in working with teens.
7. You may want to think of some quick physical activities you can do with the group as a way of relieving tension or anxiety.
8. Recognize that trainer instructions appear in plain type and trainer comments appear in ***bold and italics***.

# Day One

## **I. Introductions – 10 MINUTES**

Joining Exercise – Interesting or Unique Facts: Participants introduce themselves and share interesting or unique facts about themselves with the group. The leader of the group goes first in order to model the activity.

## **II. Purpose of the Group – 5 MINUTES**

State the purpose of the group and include the following information (in your own words):

Achieving permanence for older youth in the foster care system has always been a challenge. Today, we consider the relationships that youth in care have with their family of origin. These relationships, though important to the youth, are often viewed as a barrier to permanency. However, we consider connections with family of origin as a tool for achieving permanence for older youth.

We often hear youth voice reluctance about adoption or guardianship, as well as concerns about making it on their own and their ability to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. They do not want to turn their backs on parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and others for whom they care deeply. Termination of parental rights may end the legal relationship with a child's family of origin, but most children want to remain connected in one way or another. Maintaining those family relationships brings new challenges to the table, but also offers new opportunities. In order to prevent a child's wishes from becoming an obstacle to success, we must learn to support safe contact with family members that allow everyone to move on with their lives. In order to support your connections, not only are you attending this group session, but others involved in planning for your future are also becoming involved. Social workers, judges, court staff, and prospective adoptive and permanent families are participating in sessions similar to this one.

We are going to talk about family and all the different types of families there are. Permanence is based on having strong, positive relationships. People from your past are important and hopefully can remain a part of your life. We are going to look at who is important to you and how you can stay connected to important people from your past while finding and accepting another family to fill the need for permanency. Each of you has different experiences that impact how you define family and permanence.

Think about what permanence means to you. As we move through this meeting we will look at your definitions of both family and permanence. Accepting a permanent family through adoption or guardianship should add to your network of support, not take away from it. One family should not threaten the other because they are all important.

### III. **Ground Rules – 5 MINUTES**

***Before we begin, we need to establish some ground rules for how we are going to work together. Think about what you will need from one another in order to feel comfortable participating and sharing your ideas. I will list your “rules” on this flip chart.***

**Leader’s Note:** Have a prepared flip chart titled, “Ground Rules for Working Together.” As participants give their responses, secure agreement from the other group members before listing rules on the flip chart. Some likely responses are: respect others; don’t interrupt; stay on task; participate; don’t worry about “dumb” questions or responses; and be willing to take risks. You should also add “permission to pass” to the list and explain that, if there is a question or topic that makes someone very uncomfortable, then they have permission to pass.

Once you have completed the list, post it on the wall and tell the group members that the rules can be renegotiated at any time if anyone believes they are not working for the group.

### IV. **The Impact of Connections and Family – 30 MINUTES**

***To begin we are going to look at the connections you have as part of your life. Can someone give me a definition for “connections?”***

After participants give their definitions, integrate their ideas into the following:

***Connections are people, places and things to which we feel a closeness and that help us define who we are.***

Allow participants to list examples on the flip chart. Some likely responses are: parents; siblings; friends; school; pets; hobbies; and church.

***Now that we have defined “connections” and listed some examples, let’s look at personal connections you have had and lost. Please write your lost connections down now.*** (Allow time for participants to list their connections.)

***Let's look at and list important connections that have been lost for you. Who will share one of the connections on their list?***

List the lost connections on the flip chart until everyone's list has been exhausted.

***Now that we have identified your lost connections, let's look at how they were lost, how it felt and what can be done now to assist you with these connections.***

Review the list of lost connections one by one and discuss how the connection ended. Find out who made the decision to end the connection and what input the youth had in the decision-making.

Next, discuss participants' feelings about losing their connections. In all probability, there will be a lot of sadness and anger. Allow the participants to identify their feelings, but do not allow the discussion to get out of hand.

Finally, discuss whether or not participants would like to re-establish their connections and, if so, how they plan to accomplish this.

***All connections are important to us. As you explore your permanency options, please remember that all those working with you realize the importance of your connections, past and present, and will work to maintain those connections once you join a permanent family. To assist you in maintaining and/or contacting connections in your life, the State of Illinois provides services through the Midwest Adoption Center. You can ask your worker for more information on how to access these services.***

**Leader's Note:** This activity can stir up a lot of feelings in youth. They may express anger at the fact that they had to give up important connections and had no choice in the matter. They may also claim that no one asked them about the connections that were important to them or that their pleas to stay connected to certain individuals were ignored. You need to allow some time for participants to talk about their experiences without letting it drag on. Refocus participants on the fact that this group – along with the training that workers, legal system professionals, and prospective adoptive and permanent families are receiving – will stress the importance of maintaining connections.

- A. Ask participants to give their definition of family and record their responses on the flip chart. (Some likely responses are: people related to you by blood; and people who love and support you and whom you consider family, even if they are not related by blood.)
- B. Recognize that connections and family are often intertwined and can include the same people. Use participant definitions of family to introduce the fact that there are several types of families with which they are familiar. List and discuss how the following families fit into each participant's list of connections and their definition of family:

- **Birth family (the family into which you were born)**
- **Foster family (a family that provides temporary care for children and youth until they can be reunited with their birth family or move to another, permanent family)**
- **Adoptive family (a family that provides children and youth with permanence and goes before a judge to assume legal responsibility as a parent or parents)**
- **Blended family (a family in which more than one family comes together, such as a mother who marries again, bringing her children to live with her new husband and his children)**
- **Guardian family (this family goes before a judge and becomes the legal guardian of a child or youth but does not acquire the legal status afforded to an adoptive family)**
- **Family or kin not related by blood (People who fill the role of family but are not related by blood)**

Ask participants if there are any other types of families that they can think of. If so, add these families to the list and discuss.

- C. ***We have looked at several types of families. Now I want you to explore a little further the different categories these families can fall into. All the families we discussed fall into three categories. Let's look at them and identify the differences:***

List the three categories on the flip chart, discuss and clarify. Let participants define what each type of family does before clarifying and refining the definitions.

***We have discussed these types of families already. However, it is important to clarify the roles these different families play in your life.***

- **Birth family** (The family into which a child is born. Some children grow up living with their birth family, while others do not.)
- **Legal family** (The family to which a child belongs legally. For example, an adoptive family becomes the “legal family” of the child they adopt. An adopted child has the same rights as a birth child, such as inheritance. A guardian family serves the role of guardian and is, “legally responsible for the child/youth.” However, they are not the legal family in the sense that they do not have parental rights and the child does not have the same rights as the birth children of the guardian family.)
- **Parenting family** (The family that is there for a child/youth to provide day-to-day parenting. Several different families could fill this role: the birth family, a foster family, a relative family, an adoptive family or a guardian family.)

***D. Now it’s time to discuss the role of each of these families.***

Either conduct this as a large group activity or divide participants into small groups and assign each group a different type of family. If done as a large group, list participant responses on the flip chart. If conducted in small groups, allow participants five to seven minutes to list the different roles of each type of family. Ask each group to identify an individual who will list their responses on the flip chart and report back to the large group.

- E. Summarize the activity by acknowledging that many people can fill the role of family.***

***Throughout this session, we will explore different types of families and connections, and what roles they play in your life. Right now, we are going to move ahead and discuss the role of a family.***

## V. What Does a Family Do? – 30 MINUTES

- A. The Role of Family: ***We have identified several types of families. Now let's look at what a family does. You are going to work in small groups. Keeping in mind the list of the different types of families we just reviewed, you will make a list of what a family does for you. For example, a birth family gives you your physical characteristics; a parenting family – whether it is birth, foster, adoptive or guardian – provides for your physical needs like food and shelter.*** (Instructions for the activity should be listed on the flip chart.)

**Leader's Note:** Prepare a flip chart with the following:

### Instructions for Small Group Activity

1. Select a reporter for your group.
  2. List all the roles filled by the family assigned to your group.
  3. Record your responses on the flip chart.
  4. Be prepared to report back to the large group.
1. Divide the participants into small groups and give them five to seven minutes to develop their lists.
  2. At the end of the allotted time, ask each group to report back to the large group.
  3. Make a list of all responses.
  4. After you have compiled a list of responses, ask participants to return to their small groups and come to agreement on whether or not anyone is filling each of the roles they listed. If there are roles that are not being filled for a participant, ask that person to identify someone who might be able to fill the role.  
  
(For example, one identified need might be offering support and encouragement. A social worker may be filling that need at present, but an adoptive or permanent family would be more appropriate to fill that need in the future.)
  5. Give participants five to seven minutes to complete this task. Then reconvene and discuss how many of the identified family roles are being filled in their lives now, who is filling those roles and who might fill those roles in the future.

**Leader's Note:** When the small groups report, some likely responses for each type of family are:

**Birth families**

- give life.
- determine how a child looks.
- provide talents or abilities.
- protect and care for their children.

**Legal families**

- provide for a child's daily needs.
- are legally responsible for a child.
- protect and care for their children.
- may provide inheritance.
- give guidance and support.

**Parenting families**

- provide for a child's daily needs
- are there every day to make sure that a child is nurtured and protected.
- help with schoolwork.
- support a child in his or her activities.
- offer guidance and support.
- feed, clothe and provide shelter for a child.

After each group has reported, give the reporters some sort of token to thank them for their work.

B. Integrating Current Connections and Family into a Permanent Family Relationship

1. ***Part of the work you do every day revolves around integrating your past, your present and your future. The connections activity helped you identify who is important to you and what contributes to who you are. Every day you work at pulling all of these things together, making you the person you are. Another part of that work is integrating your connections and your families.***
2. ***Now we are going to discuss the concept of three families. It is said that we all have three families.***

Write and explain each of the following:

- **Family of origin** (*This is another way of describing the birth family. The family of origin is the family into which we are born.*) Ask someone to share a description of their family of origin.
- **Family of circumstance** (*This term is used to describe our current family situation. Depending on where we are in our lives, the family of circumstance can be different. For some people, their family of circumstance is also their family of origin. For others, like you, it might be a foster family or an adoptive family. For someone who is an adult and married, it would be their spouse and children, if they have them. For adults who are not married, it could be a roommate or friend who fills the role of a family member. Can you think of other types of families that would be a family of circumstance? Would someone volunteer to share with the group a description of their family of circumstance?)*
- **Fantasy family** (*Everyone has a fantasy family. It is that ideal family that we wish we could be a part of. It might be that they are rich and famous. Or it might simply be a different version of our current family, with all the qualities we want them to have. Sometimes it is a combination of families in which we have lived. Would someone be willing to share an example of their fantasy family?)*

**Break – (10 MINUTES)**

**VI. Eco-Map of Family – 30 MINUTES**

- A. I am asking you to consider how you can blend your current important connections with the permanent family I hope you will find. One way to help you achieve that is by using an eco-map, which is simply a diagram of your family as well as the important people and components of your life.**
- B. To demonstrate, I am going to share with you an eco-map of my family.** (The group leader should use either their birth family or their family of circumstance.)

- C. ***First let's look at how you prepare an eco-map.*** (Give the participants the eco-map handout and instructions – see pages 26-28 – and review them with the group.) ***Now that we have reviewed how to prepare an eco-map, let's look at the one I prepared.***
- D. Share the prepared eco-map with the group and explain.
- E. ***Use this paper to complete your eco-map. You will have 15 minutes to complete an eco-map of either your birth family or your family of circumstance. When the time is up, I am going to ask for volunteers to share their eco-maps.***
- F. When the time is up, ask for volunteers to share their eco-maps.

**Leader's Note:** Encourage at least two volunteers to share their eco-maps with the group. Allow other group members to offer comments. Focus on the positive relationships and supports that the participants have. Also ask if there are things missing from their eco-map that they would like to have (i.e. a permanent family or a closer relationship with their siblings).

Be sure to thank the participants who share their eco-maps and give them a token as a reward.

If everyone wants to share their eco-map, then you can break into small groups, encourage participants to share their eco-maps and then reconvene as a large group to discuss what they learned.

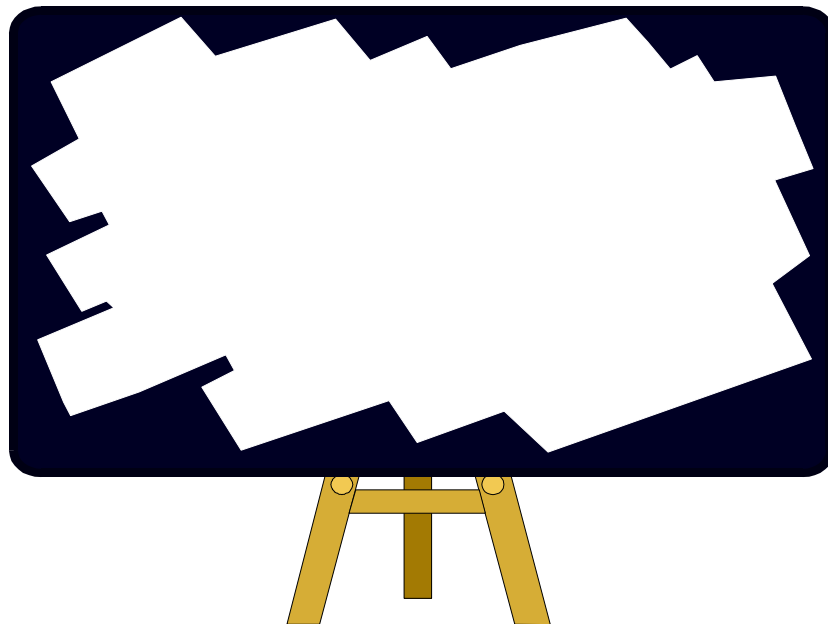
- G. ***Now that you have completed an eco-map, you are going to have the opportunity to create another family. I want you to complete an eco-map of the permanent family you picture yourself being able to live in successfully.***
- H. Allow another 10 minutes for participants to complete this eco-map.
- I. Once participants have completed this task, ask for volunteers to share their new “families.”
- J. List on newsprint the characteristics of the new “families” (for example: one-parent or two-parent households; accepting of other children; maintaining connections to important people; having pets in the household; allowing children to participate in extra-curricular activities; and partaking in certain family activities).

- K. Discuss how participants might use this information to assist their social workers in permanency planning and finding a family for them.

***You know yourself best and have the most insight into the type of family in which you can be successful. It is important that you share this information with your social worker. Since you have thought about and created an eco-map of a permanent family in which you see yourself being successful, let's talk about how you can share this information with your social worker to assist him or her in finding a permanent family for you.***

Allow group members to share their ideas. (Some likely responses are: talking with their social worker about their preferences; sharing their eco-map with their social worker; making a list of what they want from a permanent family; and sharing that list with their social worker.)

**Recap of Day One – (10 MINUTES)**



**End of Day One**

## Day Two

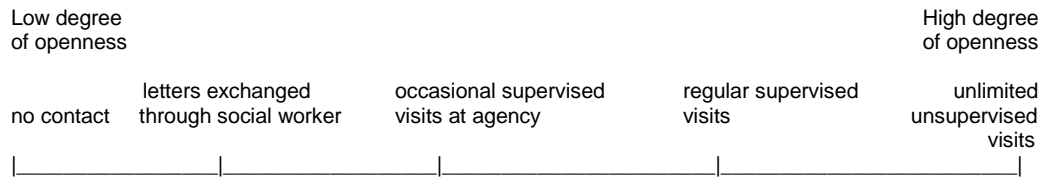


### VII. The Continuum of Openness in Connections – 20 MINUTES

Recap the Day One session and use the eco-map piece as a transition to the continuum of openness.

A. ***Maintaining connections is important to your emotional well-being. However, how those connections are maintained can depend on a number of situations and circumstances.***

1. Ask participants to identify circumstances that could influence the type and frequency of ongoing contact with their important connections. (Some likely responses are: they do not live close; and circumstances such as illness, incarceration and safety concerns prevent face-to-face contact.)
2. Review the continuum of openness in connections with participants, asking them to identify different types of contact they might have with their connections. Draw a diagram to illustrate the continuum on the flip chart and identify various types of ongoing contact that youth might have with important attachment figures. Ask the participants to help plot where those contacts might fall on the continuum, ranging from a low degree of openness to a high degree of openness. (Be sure to plot all types of contact identified by the participants, including e-mails and phone calls.)



3. Bridge to the next section: ***Next we are going to discuss blending your current connections into those you will make with a permanent family resource.***

## **VIII. Blending Ongoing Connections with a Permanent Family Resource 30 MINUTES**

- A. The Plan to Maintain Ongoing Connections: The following questions can be answered as a large group or in smaller groups. (If participants split into small groups, then each group should be assigned two or three questions to answer before reconvening to discuss as a large group.) Either distribute the questions as a handout or list them on the flip chart. Responses should be captured on the flip chart whether this exercise is done in a large group or in small groups.
  1. **Who should decide how connections are maintained?** (Some likely responses are: the social worker should make the decision; everyone involved should help make the decision; and I should make the decision.)
  2. **How should connections be monitored?** (Some likely responses are: I will let the social worker know how my contacts go; the social worker will monitor my contacts; and the social worker, my ongoing connections, my permanent family and I will all help monitor the success of the my contacts.) The case worker or post-adoption staff will mediate the ongoing connections agreement.
  3. **What role do I want to play in negotiating the type and frequency of my contacts?** (Some likely responses are: I should have the primary role in the negotiation and agreement; I want to have input, along with everyone else involved in the negotiation and agreement; and my role should be equal to that of my worker and my connections.) Explain that participants will play a role in the negotiation and agreement.

4. **What role do I want my social worker to play in my ongoing contacts with my connections?** (Some likely responses are: my worker should act as an intermediary in helping to plan contacts; the decision on how and when contacts occur should be made by the worker; and the worker should listen to what everybody wants and then help my connections and I reach an agreement on contacts.)
5. **What should a prospective permanent family know about my ongoing connections? When should they be told?** (Responses may include: prospective permanent families should know from the beginning that I want to maintain ongoing connections, and with whom; and the worker should help prospective permanent families understand why these connections are important to me.)
6. **Who should assess the ongoing connections to make sure they are appropriate and successful?** (Some likely responses are: I should have the primary role in assessing the connections, as it is my life and these are my connections; everyone involved – including my connections, my social worker and I – should have input in assessing the contacts; and the social worker should assess the appropriateness and success of the connections based on what I report.)
7. **Who should provide support if concerns or issues arise?** (Responses may include: my social worker; my current family; my connections; my counselor or therapist; and my siblings.) Explain that an adoption preservation agency will provide services after adoption occurs.

***Different people will play different roles in crafting the agreement to maintain your ongoing connections. You should remember that the agreement is not legally binding and, in order for it to be successful, all parties must keep their word and live up to its provisions.***

**Break – (10 MINUTES)**

## IX. What Happens Now? – 50 MINUTES

### A. Finding a permanent family resource.

1. Discuss how families are recruited for older youth. Point out that a permanent family resource may be someone who is already known to the youth or someone who is completely new.

***Let's talk about how families are found for older youth. What has your worker told you about how she or he will find a permanent family for you?*** (Ask participants to share those recruitment options that have been discussed with them. These may include: the state photo listing; a TV feature; a video to share with prospective families; a newspaper feature; a feature or listing on an agency website; and events like picnics or parties that allow waiting youth to meet waiting families.)

2. Ask participants to complete, "Thinking about My Past and My Future." ***Here is a handout that will help you look at some of the people and placements from your past and what makes them memorable for you. I want to you to take 10 minutes to complete this handout. Think about it carefully. You know what works for you and the qualities in families that make you feel comfortable. This can help you and your worker know what qualities a permanent family needs to possess to make it work for you.***
3. Give participants 15 minutes to complete the handout. After the handout is completed ask them to share some of the things they learned by completing it. Discuss each question on the handout and allow participants to express their feelings and articulate what they are looking for in a permanent family. Ask each participant for permission to share the handout with their worker in order to identify people who may serve as permanent connections or family for them. For youth who are in agreement, ask them to put their names and their social worker's name on the handout. For youth who do not want to share the handout, ask them to list information and family qualities on a separate sheet of paper that they would be willing to share with their social worker. Explain to them that the more information their social worker has about what they are looking for in a permanent family, the better chance they have of finding that family.

B. When an adoptive or permanent family has been found:

1. ***What do you want to know about the family?*** (List responses on the flip chart. Responses may include: who is in the family; why do they want me to be part of their family; where do they live; what do they do for a living; what are their hobbies and family activities; will I have my own room; where will I go to school; and do they have pets? There may be a long list of responses. Capture as much information as you can, but do not allow the listing to continue for more than five to seven minutes.)
2. ***Now let's think about how you would like to meet the family. How would you like to be introduced or re-introduced to the family? How should your ongoing connections be discussed with the family?*** (Give participants the opportunity to list as many options as they can identify. Examples may include: at a restaurant or neutral place; at the social worker's office; at my current placement; or at the adoptive/permanent family's home.)

Role-play one of the plans for meeting the permanent family. Use volunteers from the group to play the family and the teen being placed in a permanent family.

***Okay, you have come up with a good list of possibilities for that first meeting with your permanent family. Let's choose one of them and role-play how that meeting might go.***

Allow the group to decide which of the meeting options they want to role-play. (You may want to review the list they have made and let them vote for the one they want to role-play.) Explain to them that you will be playing the social worker who will make the introductions and discuss the importance of maintaining ongoing connections. Then, ask participants to volunteer for the roles of the youth being placed and the adoptive/permanent parents.

Tell those group members who are not participating in the role-play that you are going to ask them for feedback. Ask them to pay special attention to:

- what the social worker did that worked well.
- how they felt about the family's response.
- what could be done differently to help the youth and family feel more comfortable.

Conduct the role-play for five to seven minutes. Be sure to introduce the youth to the family, stress the youth's desire to maintain ongoing connections and talk about common interests that may allow both parties to begin talking with one another.

**Leader's Note:** When conducting the role-play ask the participants to use names other than their own. Also be sure to:

- give a description of the meeting place and "paint a picture with words."
- conduct the role-play as if you were actually facilitating the meeting. Be real and genuine in discussing your feelings as well as what you want to accomplish. For example, you can say, "I am excited about being here today to give you the opportunity to meet one another. Jason is a special young man and giving him the opportunity to have a permanent family is something he and I have discussed many times."
- introduce the youth to the prospective family by name.

Talk about the youth's desire to maintain ongoing connections. For example, you can say, "Mr. and Mrs. Smith, I know that in your preparation for adoption the need for many of the older youth to maintain connections with birth family members was discussed. Jason has some important connections that he would like to maintain after he joins your family. One is with his older brother who lives in a nearby community and the other is with his birth mother who, because of medical issues, could not care for Jason. Both Jason's brother and his birth mother know that he wants a permanent family and are supportive of that plan. They would like to remain in touch with him."

Continue the role-play activity:

- Ask Jason if he has anything he wants to add about his ongoing connections.
- Ask Mr. and Mrs. Smith how they feel about Jason maintaining these connections.
- Tell the Smiths that, as visits with Jason progress, you will introduce them to his brother and birth mother, and that all parties will work together to reach an agreement regarding contacts.
- Tell the Smiths you are going to give them some time to talk with one another.

End the role-play, but ask those group members who participated to stay "in character" for the time being.

After you have ended the role-play, ask each of the participants to respond:

- First, ask them how they are feeling. Be sure they identify a specific emotion.
- Next, ask each of the participants in the role-play to tell you what went well, from their perspective.
- Ask the observers to tell you what worked well, from their perspective.
- Next, ask each of the participants in the role-play what you could have done differently that would have helped them feel more comfortable or made the introduction go more smoothly.
- Ask the observers for ideas on what they would have done differently or what they would have needed to feel more comfortable.
- Take the role players out of their roles by saying, ***“I am going to take you out of your role now. You are no longer [name they used in the role-play]. I want you to take a step forward and tell me who you are by stating your name.”***
- Thank the role players for participating and give them a token of appreciation.

**3. Now that we have talked about meeting a permanent family, we are going to discuss preparing to move to a family. I want you to think about how you will know when you are ready to make the move to your permanent family. Tell me how you will know you are ready.**

Allow participants to respond and record their responses on the flip chart. Their responses may include: I feel comfortable with the new family; I don't want to go back to my current placement at the end of a visit; I am beginning to feel like a part of the family; I look forward to being with them; and it's the end of the school year and a good time to make the move.

### C. The Social Worker's Role

Invite one or two social workers to attend this part of the session and ask them to discuss their role with the participants. Try to invite social workers who are currently working with group members.

Introduce the social workers to the group and thank them in advance for their willingness to answer questions. Preface the discussion by saying that, because the social workers are busy and the group time is limited, the discussion will last no longer than 20 minutes. (You may want to set a timer for 20 minutes so you will know when to end the discussion. You may also want to post questions for the social workers on the flip chart or give participants a handout with sample questions that they can ask or add to.

Make sure all the participants in the group know who their social worker is before addressing the following questions:

- What is the social worker's role in recruitment?
- What is the social worker's role in supporting me?
- Will my social worker listen to me with regard to:
  - the type of permanent family in which I can be successful?
  - the environment in which I would like to be introduced to the permanent family?
  - my readiness to move to the permanent family?
  - my needs and wishes regarding contact with my ongoing connections?
- How much input will I have into the plan to maintain my ongoing connections?

**Leader's Note:** You need to move the discussion along to make sure that each question is discussed and that there is time for participants to ask additional questions. At the end of the allotted 20 minutes, stop the discussion, thank the social workers for coming and allow them to leave. You may want to allow an additional five minutes for the group to react after the social workers have left. However, do not allow this to turn into a gripe session.

D. What Are the Alternatives If No Family Is Found?

1. ***Even with our best efforts and your willingness to consider placement in a permanent family, not every youth waiting for a family finds one right away. This has nothing to do with the youth. It is because there is a shortage of families to parent older youth and the agency sometimes fails to find the right family.***
2. Ask the group what they think might happen if no family is found. (Some of the responses may include: I will stay with my current family until I am 18, then move out on my own; I will go back and live with a birth family member; I will get an apartment; and I will go to college and live on campus.)
3. Discuss options for connection when the move to a permanent family is not achieved.

***You have identified several options that could come into play if a permanent family is not located prior to your leaving the foster care system. Even if you move out on your own, you will still need ongoing support from other people. We all need people we can turn to for guidance and support throughout our lives. You are no exception. Let's think about who might fill that role for you. Who could you go to for support and guidance after you leave foster care?***

(Responses may include: former foster parents; adult siblings; other birth family members; teachers, coaches, someone from church; and adult friends.)

4. Reinforce the need for lifelong connections:

***Many youth in the foster care system are eager to leave and be "independent." However, when you think about it, who among us is truly independent? We all need people in our lives to give us support or just listen to us. In order to be complete as a person, we need to be connected to others. Sometimes the need is simply for those everyday things that people who have permanent families take for granted: a place to go on holidays, someone to celebrate our accomplishments with us or people to be grandparents for our children.***

- a. ***So let's answer these questions: "Why is it important to be connected to others? Why is it important to have people you can turn to for support even when you are an adult?"***

(Some likely responses are: we just need people we can talk to; to assist us in making decisions or exploring our options; to go to for advice and assistance; and to give us a sense of belonging. Capture all responses on the flip chart.)

- b. ***You have developed a good list of daily needs that can be met by a family member or a support person after you exit foster care. What we need to think about now is, “Where can these people be found?”*** Gather responses from group members.

***Let’s go back to the, “Thinking about My Past and My Future” handout and discuss the people you listed as important parts of your life. Is there anyone among the people you listed that you would like the agency to contact about providing ongoing support and serving as a connection for you?***

If a participant identifies people on the handout, ask them for permission to share that information with their social worker.

- c. ***The goal of everyone working with you is to make sure you are connected to caring adults who will be there to support you when you exit foster care. These adults can be permanent family or people who will commit to ongoing support for you if a permanent family is not recruited.***

## **X. Closure – 10-15 MINUTES**

***You have worked hard and been open in exploring your options for permanence and connections as you prepare to enter the adult world. I appreciate your openness and honesty in talking about your feelings and providing insight into what will work for you. As we prepare to end this meeting, I would like each of you to identify one positive thing you have gained from the group. I am going to begin.***

State clearly for the group one positive thing you are taking away from the group. For example: I am leaving here optimistic that each of you is willing to explore permanent relationships that will continue into adulthood. Allow each participant to give a response.

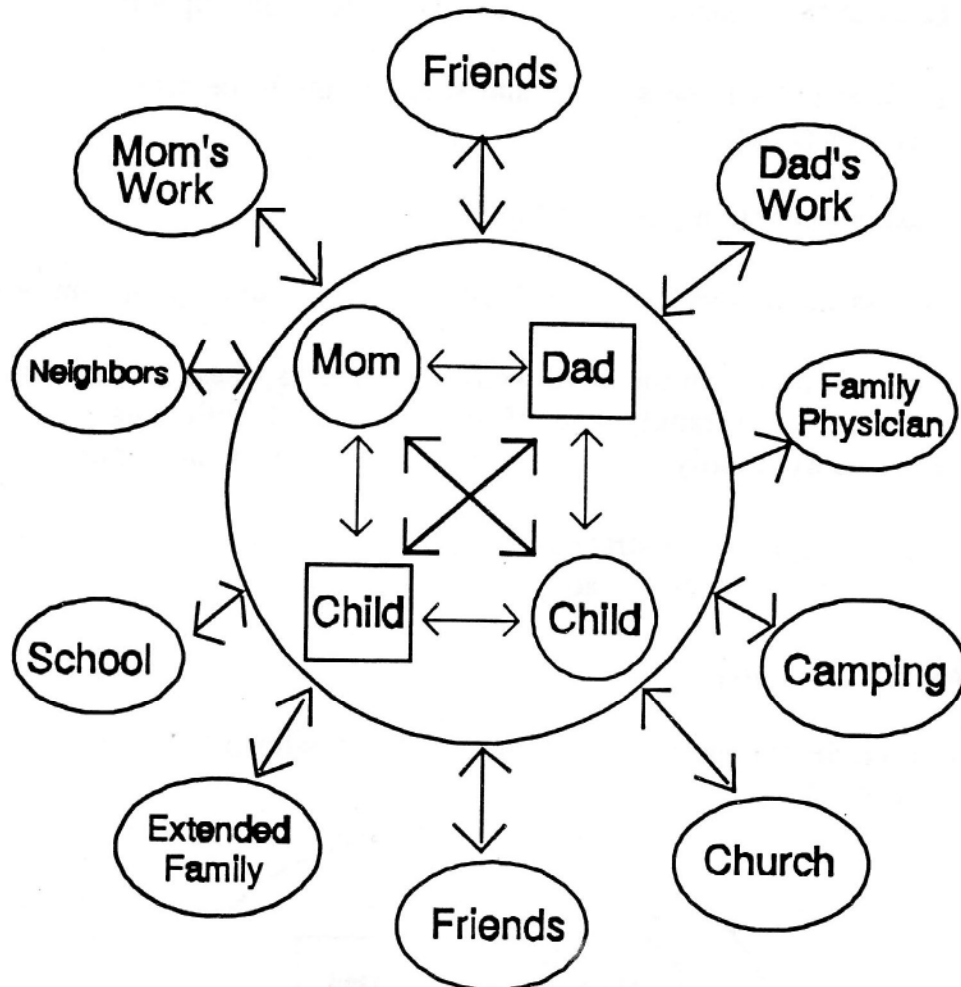
Close the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation and hard work.

## **End of Day Two**

## AN ECO-MAP TO DRAW

Steps to drawing your Eco-Map:

1. In a large circle, write the names of all the people who live in your household (pets are allowed, too). Use circles to indicate female family members and squares to indicate male family members.
2. Next, draw circles outside the family circle to indicate the people or groups that give or take away energy in your life. Label the other circles using different aspects of your family life ("School," "Friends," "Hobbies," "Church," "Birth Family," "Siblings," etc.)



3. Draw lines between each circle to indicate the type of relationship. Use the following criteria:

- Solid line for a strong relationship \_\_\_\_\_
- Dotted line for a weak relationship - - - - -
- Hash marks for a difficult relationship ////////////////

If the outside circle affects the family as a whole, draw the line to the family circle.

4. For circles outside the family circle, draw an arrow in the direction of the flow of energy. For example, if you give and receive energy from your friends, you would draw a line from you to the “friends” circle with an arrow at each end of the line. If you only give energy to one of the circles listed, then you would draw a line to that circle and have an arrow pointing toward the circle but not toward you.

5. When you draw your eco-map think about all the people, places and things to which you are connected. This is your personal eco-map and will not look like anyone else’s. Be sure to include all the connections that are important to you.

6. Think about the following questions as you complete your eco-map:

- How would my eco-map change if I joined a permanent family?
- How would my current relationships be impacted if I joined a permanent family?
- Would the strong relationships I have now continue if I joined a permanent family?
- What other circles might be added to my eco-map if I joined a permanent family?

## **MY ECO-MAP**

(use this page to draw your eco-map)

## THINKING ABOUT MY PAST AND MY FUTURE

Please answer the following questions. You can choose people from your current network of friends and acquaintances or people from your past. Please think carefully about your answers.

- Where do you feel most comfortable?
- With what person or persons do you feel most comfortable?
- Describe the place you lived, other than your birth family home, where you felt most at home? Who lived there and why did it feel like home?
- Who do you call for advice or just to talk?
- Who praises you and makes you feel good about yourself?
- Who believes in you?
- Who do you trust?
- Who would you call if you were in trouble?
- If you could choose where you were going to live, where would it be and why?
  - 1<sup>st</sup> choice
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> choice
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> choice

