

## Teens 2 Homes Peer Groups

### Session 2: What Does Permanency Look Like?

#### Objectives:

The group members will:

1. Increase their understanding of the concept of permanency
2. Increase their awareness of various permanency options
3. Increase their understanding of the relationship between permanency and life skills/independent living services.

#### Preparation & Materials

- Room set-up should include table for group conversation and activities, as well as space for a panel of 3-4 presenters for the second half of the session.
- Flipchart & markers
- Sheets of construction paper, cardstock, or even copy paper – 8 ½” x 11”
- Tape

#### Outline:

##### I. Check-In & Overview (10 Minutes/ 4:00 - 4:10 p.m.)

Brief check-in update with participants. How is everyone feeling so far about the peer group sessions? Are there any left over questions or comments from last week?

Provide a brief overview of the session: we will be defining what permanency can mean, and in the second half of the session, will have a panel presentation by family members who are part of different types of permanency relationships. Let the young people know they will have an opportunity to ask questions and talk informally with the panel members.

##### II. Activity: What is Permanency? (Part 1) (15 Minutes/ 4:10 – 4:25 p.m.)

Distribute 3-4 sheets of 8 ½” x 11” paper and markers to each participant. Ask the participants to think about how they would define permanency? Encourage them to think about the feelings that people share within permanent family relationships as well as the type of family constellations/settings that can offer permanency (e.g. kinship care, return to birth family, adoption, etc.). Ask them not to share their ideas with the group yet, but rather, to put them down on the pieces of paper they have been given. They should write a response on as many sheets as they like, up to a maximum of 3 or 4. Encourage them to keep their responses brief – one word if they wish – and to write fairly large, so that everyone will be able to see them.

As the group completes the activity, post the sheets on a wall or display board. Encourage each participant to briefly share or explain the responses they have given. The purpose of this activity is to initiate thought and conversation about permanency options. Therefore, at this point, group leaders should accept all responses, adding and clarifying as necessary.

### **III. Teaching: Defining Permanency (20 Minutes/ 4:25 – 4:45 p.m.)**

Note: This material may be particularly difficult for the youth. It should be delivered fairly briskly and at a level that will provide for basic understanding. The focus for this segment is not eliciting deep emotional reactions, rather, on educating by providing helpful information. At the same time, the pace of the presentation and amount of processing necessary will depend on the reactions of the particular youth who are participating.

Transition to this segment by telling the group that now that we have talked about some ideas of their ideas of what permanency is, we will also learn about what some other people have to say on the subject.

List on a flip-chart or display board the three types of permanency which will be discussed (Relational, Physical, Legal). Present the following information as a “mini-lecture”, providing group with opportunities to comment and question as you move along. Read the suggested quotes to the group as examples of each type of permanency.

This content is taken from “Youth Perspectives on Permanency” a booklet produced by the California Youth Permanency Project. It is available on line at <http://www.cpyy.org/Files/YouthPerspectives.pdf>. Group leaders may find it helpful to review the booklet prior to presenting this material. You may also wish to provide some or all of the booklet as a handout for the young people, as appropriate.

- **Types of Permanency: *California Youth Permanency Project***

A program in California surveyed young people living in foster care and group care settings as well as some young adults who grew up in the system. These young people were asked how they would define permanency and they identified three different types:

- **Relational**

Refers to having a strong, true and stable emotional relationship with a caring adult. This quote from one of the youth who was interviewed best describes relational permanency: “It’s important to know that there is someone I can count on who wouldn’t turn their back on me.”

- **Physical**

Refers to having a stable, secure living situation, where you know you will not have to move and can focus on other important areas of life, such as school, friends, planning for the future, etc. Quote: “I can truly say that the goal of

every foster child is to live in one home with people they can call family and not have to experience a lot of emotional turmoil.”

- **Legal**

Refers to a relationship that is legally secure, and recognized by the government, which can include being in the custody of birth family, adoption, legal guardianship or legal custody. The youth who were interviewed split on whether legal permanency is important or not. Some thought it was very important, others thought it was not important at all. Here are some quotes that represent each of these points of view:

Legal permanence is important:

“Even though I cannot be adopted right now because my biological parents still maintain their rights, after I turn eighteen, I want to be adopted because it’s like a closure to the family. It’s making it so that the last piece has been put in the puzzle. Right now, we know it mentally. But legally, it would be putting the family together. Right now she’s considered a legal guardian. If she adopts me, it would be mother.”

“Legal permanency would have been the best thing for my interests, because that is a legal commitment that you could not sit on the side, and as far as foster parents, I don’t really like that situation, because kids mess up, we’re not perfect. And if we mess up, foster parents can say, hey, I don’t want you. And get that last check. And that’s not right, that’s no actual commitment.”

Legal permanence is *not* important:

“She said she would adopt me, but it wasn’t a big issue for me. Because it didn’t matter. That would just be a title. She wouldn’t even have to be my legal guardian and I’d still love her just as much.”

“Depending on your age, you really aren’t too much in tune with legal permanency. I think, above all, it’s the emotional, having someone there.”

Process the group members reactions to each type of permanency, and ask if they have examples to share of any or all of these types. Begin to wrap up this discussion by asking the young people if they agree that in an ideal situation, all three types of permanency would be present, relational, physical and permanence.

- **Relationship with Life Skills/Independent Living**

Briefly discuss with the group the idea that permanency planning and independent living or life skills services are not mutually exclusive. Ideally, we all need family relationships and we all need to learn how to live as independent adults. Most youth will agree with this, but if there are any feel or believe differently, process any concerns or misunderstandings they may have.

### **III. What is Permanency, Part 2 (10 Minutes/ 4:45 – 4:55)**

Return to the sheets which were posted earlier with the group's definitions of permanency. First, pick out any sheets that identify particular types of family settings that can be permanency options (reunification, adoption, kinship care, etc.) Ask to group to consider everything that has been discussed so far this session, and to identify any other types of family settings that can be permanency options: list these on the board or flipchart, until a list has been created that includes at a minimum:

Adoption  
Reunification  
Living with relatives or Kinship Care  
Long Term Foster Care

Ask group to consider each of the options that have been listed and discuss whether they offer relational, legal or physical permanency, or any combination of the three. If appropriate, group leaders, may wish to assist the group in differentiating between kinship care and long term foster care settings that offer "permanency" and those that do not.

BREAK (10 Minutes/ 4:55-5:05)

### **IV. Panel: Permanency Options (45 Minutes/ 5:05 – 5:50 p.m.)**

A panel of 3-4 persons should be gathered, with representatives of families living with various forms of permanency relationship such as adoption and permanent kinship care. If it is possible, young adults from these families may also be included on the panel. Panel participants should be prepared to discuss their own family situation and should be comfortable responding to questions from the group members.

Begin the presentation by asking the panel members to briefly introduce themselves - names, type of family situation (e.g.: we are adoptive parents, we are foster parents, etc.) Have group members briefly introduce themselves to the panel members.

Begin the presentation by asking each family represented to describe their family: who are the members of their family and how did they join the family (ex, by birth, adoption, kinship care, other type of permanent commitment). This should serve to identify the various types of permanency options available in the room. Then go back and give each family an opportunity to describe in more detail the story of how they became involved with kinship, foster care or adoption, and how their family was built.

Guide the families through the discussion supplementing with the questions below as needed. Encourage the group members to ask questions, as well.

- Why did you initially decide to foster, adopt, become a kinship parent, etc?

- What process did you go through to do this? (Have parents give the group an idea of what the training and licensing process is from the parents point of view.)
- Did you become involved because you knew a specific child who needed a home or was your interest more general?
- How did you decide to offer a permanent home to your child?
- Why do you think permanency was important for your child? (Key point to address\*\*\*)
- What process did you have to go through to make this relationship permanent?
- How did your child react to the idea of being a permanent member of your family?
- What has been the best thing about this for you? For your child?
- What has been most difficult?

Conclude by asking panel members if they have any final thought they would like to share with the group. Thank the panel for their attendance and allow them to leave.

You may wish to time the session so that a brief informal break can occur at this time, so that the group members and panel members can say personal goodbye's.

## **VII. Wrap-Up/Closing** (10 Minutes/ 5:50-6:00 p.m.)

Process with the group members their reactions to the panel presentation. Particular points to underscore would be the variety of permanency options that are possible, the presence of a lifelong, loving relationship with is common to all of them, and the importance of permanency in the lives of the families represented.

Ask how everyone is feeling now and whether anyone is feeling more anxious or worried about their situation. Reassure the group members that no final decisions are being made at this point about permanency for each of them as individuals. We will be talking more in a later session about how to work with the various relationships in your life. Encourage them to talk with their parents/caregivers/professionals about any concerns that they may have.

\*\*Make arrangements for follow-up support by parents, caregivers and therapists for young people who seem to be having a difficult time emotionally with the content of this session.

Resources:

Frey, L., Greenblatt, S.B., & Brown, J. (2005). *A call to action: An integrated approach to youth permanency and transition preparation for adulthood*. New Haven, CT: The Casey Family Services. Available online at [http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey\\_permanency\\_0505.pdf](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey_permanency_0505.pdf).

Maluccio, A.N., Fein, E. and Olmstead, K.A.. (1986). *Permanency planning for children: Concepts and methods*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

Sanchez, R. M. (2004). *Youth Perspectives on Permanency*. San Francisco, CA: California Youth Connection & California Permanency for Youth Project. Available online at <http://www.cyp.org/Files/YouthPerspectives.pdf>.