SESSION SIX LOGISTICS

Session Six: Endings and Beginnings

Duration: 1.5 hours

Session Goals: The final meeting addresses a key challenge: managing a child or teen’s transition to reunification or some other form of permanence, in a safe, supportive way. Group members discuss how a foster placement might end, examine real-world factors that influence how children and caregivers experience this phase and discuss helpful transition strategies. Participants also have an opportunity to process their own transition as the ARC Reflections training ends.

Materials Needed:
- Whiteboard or flip chart and markers
- PowerPoint slides
- Pens and paper
- Multicolored markers on each table

Session Summary:
- Not all endings are the same. Types of transitions in foster care:
  - Reunification with biological family
  - Transition into a (pre-)adoptive home
  - Transition into another foster home
  - Higher level of care (group home, residential, hospitalization)
  - AWOL (absent without leave or running away)
  - Aging out/emancipation
- Transitions can be particularly challenging for children and teens in foster care because of their:
  - History of multiple losses
  - Negative lens of self (“Will everyone reject me?”)
  - Negative lens of others (“Will my next person be safe?”)
  - Fears about the future
  - Trouble coping with stress and big feelings
  - Easy activation of the Express Road
  - Hard time reaching out for help
  - Difficulty managing changes and unpredictability
- You can support a positive transition by:
  - Starting early Reflecting on your time together
  - Talking about ongoing connection
  - Paying it forward
Types Of Transitions
Supporting Transition
Grief And Loss
Self-Care
Goal
To support foster parents and caregivers in thinking about their own experiences with major transitions.

Teach/Discuss
- Take a moment to think about a few major transitions in your life. Maybe a separation from someone you cared for, a move to a new home or a shift from one developmental stage to another, such as getting married or leaving your family of origin.
- **Ask participants to take out the “Remembering endings” handout to use for this exercise.**
- Pick two of these transitions to reflect upon.
- For each one, try to remember your experience. If you had to capture the transition or ending in a few words, what would those words be? Write them down.
- Think about what influenced those words. It might have been the nature of the ending, the ways you perceived it, the extent of loss or gain or many other things.

Ask
- Ask a few volunteers to share what they noticed in completing this exercise. If not mentioned by participants, point out that even positive transitions can feel stressful or hard.
Goal
To highlight the ways in which the nature of a transition can affect how it is experienced.

Ask/Do
- How many people in the room have transitioned more than one child or teen out of their homes and into another placement, whether reunification or otherwise?
- Where are some of the places that children or teens leaving your home have gone?
- Write the list on the flip chart or whiteboard
Goal
To highlight the ways in which the nature of a transition can affect how it is experienced.

Teach/Ask
- Refer to the list generated by participants, as well as any additional ideas provided by this slide.
- How do you think the experience of transition could be affected by where the child or teen is going, whether to a relative's home, the biological parents, a hospital, etc.? Note that not every experience is the same; among us, there are probably a lot of different experiences and feelings.
- Do you think some of these transition types would feel easier or harder for you? In what ways do you think the transition type might influence your own feelings or approach?
**Goal**
To explore factors that influence how transitions are experienced by foster parents and caregivers and children or teens.

**Ask/Discuss/Do**
- Let’s explore factors that influence how children, teens, foster parents and kin caregivers might experience transitions. Thinking about what might help a transition feel easier, and what might make a transition feel harder, what would you list in each column?
- Capture ideas on the whiteboard or flip chart, focusing on overarching ideas rather than concrete examples. For instance, if someone says, “It was harder that time Olivia got pulled out with no notice by her social worker,” write down, “No advance notice.” Be prepared to offer an example or two.
Goal
To explore factors that influence how transitions are experienced by foster parents and children or teens.

Teach
- Here are some things other people have said about transitions.
- Highlight any items that may not have come up in the discussion.

Ask
- Do any of you have examples of any of these experiences, either positive or negative?
Goal
To explore the influence of historical factors on transitions.

Ask/Do
- Read the question from the slide.
- What do you think — how would you answer this question?
- **If not mentioned by the group,** describe exposure factors such as history of loss, rejection, disruptions, abandonment and failed placements. Also, mention developmental factors or outcomes such as trouble managing feelings, lack of coping strategies, difficulty seeking support, negative self-image, etc.
**Goal**
To identify previously taught factors that influence children’s and teens’ experience of transitions.

**Teach**
- Very briefly review the list on the slide
- In this group, we have discussed all the factors listed on this slide.
- All these factors have the potential to influence the child’s or teen’s experience of transitions

Transitions Are More Complicated For Those Who Have Experienced Trauma

**They may struggle with:**
A history of multiple losses
A negative lens of self (‘Will everyone reject me?’)
A negative lens of others (‘Will my next person be safe?’)
Fears about the future
Coping with stress and big feelings
Easy activation of the Express Road
Reaching out for help
Managing change and unpredictability
Goal
To describe the ways challenging behaviors may be a child’s or teen’s attempt to cope.

Ask
- Has anyone with experience transitioning a child or teen from your home witnessed any of these behaviors? Can you provide concrete examples of something a child or teen did before their transition?

Teach
- In this group, we have talked about the ways in which behavior is generally functional.
- Even very difficult behaviors, especially very difficult behaviors, can often be understood as coping strategies.
- When children and teens know they are getting ready to transition from a foster home, difficult behaviors may emerge. These may be the child’s or teen’s attempt to cope.
- Even when the change is perceived as generally positive, past experiences of abandonment, rejection and loss may trigger self-protective strategies.
- Each of the behaviors listed on this slide is common among children and teens with histories of attachment loss when they are approaching a new relationship change. Different children and teens will cope in different ways, and one child or teen may show many of these behaviors at different times in the transition process.

Ask/Discuss
- Let’s talk about one or two behaviors listed here. How might these behaviors help a child or teen cope with perceived loss, change, abandonment or rejection?
- Are any of these behaviors similar to ones you might have seen when a child first transitioned into your home? Why do you think that might be?
- If it doesn’t come up in the discussion, you might describe ways that children or teens with trauma histories and attachment losses anticipate rejection and abandonment at the start of relationships.
Goal
To invite foster parents to reflect on ways their own past and current experiences might influence their response to transition.

Ask
❖ Let’s take a moment to reflect on ways your own past and current experiences with loss, relationship changes and parenting might influence your response to children’s or teens’ transitioning out of your home.
❖ Your answers will be private — this is just for you. Think about your childhood and write down for yourself some of the major changes you experienced as a child.
❖ On the bottom of the handout, there is space for you to write down what you have learned about how you handle major life transitions and changes now, as an adult. Examples could include things like moving to a new city or leaving or entering a job. What are your typical emotions, thoughts or behaviors? Do these vary by situation?
❖ Compare your responses to the first two questions. Do you see any links? Are there ways your past experiences have influenced your approach to life change now?
Goal
To discuss the multiple members of the family who are experiencing a transition.

Teach
- Although most transition plans focus just on the child or teen in foster care and his or her needs and experiences, don’t forget that more than one person is experiencing a relationship change.
- Whether the change is perceived as a loss, a relief or a complicated mix, everyone in the family is undergoing a change in their relationships.
- It is important to pay attention to the reactions and responses of every member of the family system.

Ask
- Let’s talk about how transitioning might affect members of your family system. Consider your partner, other children, extended family, neighbors or close community members, pets, teachers, etc.
- Can anyone give an example of a way you have supported a member of your family system at the time of a child’s or teen’s transition from your home?
Teach
- Help participants create a list of things that they can do to help support the other family members who will remain in the home.
- Have participants share with each other the supportive activities they’ve identified.
Teach

- In this next section, we will discuss a number of strategies for supporting a positive transition for children and teens in your care.
- As we go, please share your own ideas and strategies that you have found helpful in your own home.
Teach

- It is important to start the transition process early — often, from the beginning. Throughout their placement, you need to anticipate that children or teens may at some point be moving into a more permanent placement, whether with their biological family or elsewhere.
- One way to support transition is to help children and teens build and maintain connections to their larger world, particularly those relationships you believe will continue beyond their placement in your home. For instance, relationships with siblings, extended family members, a spiritual or religious community or a school may all be points of continuity for a child. By investing in these broader connections, we can prevent each placement change from being a complete rewriting of the child’s world.
- Even if you know a child’s or teen’s stay with you is likely to be brief, value your contribution and let yourself build a genuine, nurturing relationship. The research is clear that one of the strongest predictors of positive outcomes in adulthood is building positive relationships in childhood.
- Although we don’t want to build anxiety by constantly talking about transition, we also don’t want to build false hope or an illusion that does not match reality. Acknowledging in an age-appropriate way that your home is not forever is something you can build into conversation over time.

Questions to Facilitate Discussion

- Can you give me examples of people in your child’s or teen’s life that you have helped the child stay connected to over time? In what ways do you believe these connections have influenced their ability to transition from your home? Review the third and fourth teaching points on the slide.
- In what ways have you talked to the children and teens in your home about whether their time in your home is temporary? What kinds of things might prevent you or make you feel uncomfortable about having those conversations?
Goal
To introduce the importance of providing children and teens with age-appropriate information.

Teach
- Knowing what to expect, at an age-appropriate level and with the depth of information desired by the child or teen, can greatly reduce fears and decrease hyper-arousal. As long as a child or teen who has experienced trauma does not know what to expect, his or her arousal and vigilance toward danger need to stay high, leading to rapid entry onto the Express Road.
- Often, we stay away from conversations about upcoming changes because we worry about a child’s or teen’s ability to handle the information. It is important to pay attention to your own fears: for instance, concern that the child or teen will become very upset (they might), act out (they might) and affect our own emotional responses. Be aware of what you are afraid of and have a plan in place for yourself (use your toolbox), but don’t let that prevent you from having conversations that a child or teen in your care might need to have.
- One way to support providing the right amount of information (enough, without being overwhelming) is to invite questions. Ask the child or teen what they might be wondering. Answer what you can and try to learn the answers you don’t know.
- If a child or teen says that he or she does not have any questions, keep in mind that this may be a self-protective strategy (“I don’t care!”). Provide basic information and make sure the child or teen knows who he or she can bring questions to.
- Pay attention to what you need to know yourself. For instance, will you be allowed to have contact with the child or teen after the move if you want to?
**Goal**
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- Pay attention to what you need to know yourself. For instance, will you be allowed to have contact with the child or teen after the move if you want to?
Goal
To identify specific types of information children or teens may want to know about their next home.

Teach
- When thinking about what type of information will be important for children or teens, consider the W’s — who, where, what, when and how.
- Particularly for younger children, concrete information (pictures, maps) may be important to support them in understanding and preparing for the change.

Ask
Review the categories of information on this slide.
- Does anyone have an example of other types of information you have found to be important for children and teens transitioning from your home?
**Goal**
To discuss continued connection after a child or teen leaves a foster home.

**Ask/Discuss**
- What has been your experience with continued communication after children or teens in foster care have left your home?
- Has anyone remained in touch with children or teens who had been placed in your home? What led to the decision to maintain or discontinue communication? What was that like?

**Teach**
- A very common question for children or teens in care (and for those who are caring for them) is what the rules will be about further communication with you and your family.
- There are many factors that will influence what happens next: your own boundaries, legal constraints, who the child or teen is being placed with, the nature of your relationship, the child’s or teen’s age and length of stay with you, etc.
- There is no one right answer to the question “What will happen next?” But it is important to be up front and discuss what the child or teen can expect after he or she leaves your home.
- It may be helpful to pull in other people to help you communicate about this (for instance, the child’s therapist or caseworker) so that it can be done in a way that feels supportive and not shaming/rejecting.
**Goal**
To share information that may be important to share with others.

**Ask**
- Can anyone provide examples of ways they have shared information with others at the time of transition?

**Teach**
- Unless a child or teen has been in your home a very short time, you are likely to have learned important information about him or her. This includes basic information (favorite colors, music, hobbies, etc.), as well as information about what helps the child or teen navigate his or her world (for instance, what helps him calm down, what she looks like when she needs help, what works well for him in the school environment, etc.).
- Capture this information in some way and communicate it to key individuals who will continue to be involved in the child’s or teen’s life.
- If the child or teen is old enough and willing, talk with him or her. What is important for other people to know? What does he or she want to make sure doesn’t get lost (for instance, a favorite recipe you make or a new game he or she learned)? Think about ways to send these with the child or teen.
- If a child or teen has become very attached to an object in your home, consider either allowing him or her to take the object or creating some memento that is symbolic of or a replica of the object.
Goal
To review the teaching points from today's session.

Ask
- Let’s review what we have discussed up to this point. Are there any remaining questions?
Grief + Loss
What is grief for you?

**Teach**
- Have participants identify what they think grief is to them and share their answers amongst each other.
Grief is a multifaceted response to a loss in which a bond or affection was formed.

**Teach**
- Review definition of grief with participants.
Teach

- This training uses the work of Collin Murray Parkes, a British psychiatrist who partnered with John Bowlby to develop theories of attachment and loss.
- The stages have been adapted to include examples of loss within the child welfare system.
- This work adopts the notion that there are certain similarities between death and loss and thus presents the stages to help us identify feelings associated with grieving.
Stages of Grief and Loss: Numbness

**Numbness:** When learning of the loss or learning that a move is coming

**Teach**
- Review the first stage of grief with the participants.
Stages of Grief and Loss: Pining

Characterized by intense feelings of grief. Yearning for what was. There may be physical manifestations: stress, loss or more sleep, poor short term memory, general symptoms of depression.

Teach

- Review the second stage of grief with the participants.
Teach

- Review the third stage of grief with the participants.

Feeling overwhelmed, experiencing sadness, reliving the loss and perhaps “anger at the system,” or anger about the manner in which the child was moved, worry that the child or family was not prepared, feeling powerless about the decision, etc.
Teach
- Review the final stage of grief with the participants.
Activity

- **Provide Grief Responses Worksheet.** Ask them to circle the responses they’ve experienced or seen in others.
- Ask participants to go through the list and explore which ones the group has in common.
- Open a discussion regarding coping techniques for each common grief response.
Self Care
What is Self-Care?

**Ask**
- Have participants identify what self-care means to them.
Teach

- Review all the different components of wellness with participants: Personal, Professional, Physical, Psychological, Emotional and Spiritual.
Facilitate Activity

Have participants fill out their own self-care wheel for all the areas of their life. Questions to have participants consider:

- What areas in their life are strong in self-care?
- What areas are low in self-care?
- What is one thing you can do to strengthen this area in your life?
Ask

Have participants think about the following reflective questions and invite participants to share in small groups.

❖ What areas in their life are strong in self-care?
❖ What areas are low in self-care?
❖ What is one thing you can do to strengthen this area in your life?
Facilitate Activity

- Have the participants answer the questions on the corresponding strips of colored paper to create a Chain of Change.
- The chain becomes a visual graphic of just how many changes have resulted from loss. This can be done individually or as a group.
- Display the chain during the rest of the discussion.
- While the participants are engaged in their activity, the facilitator is responsible for helping participants who may be struggling with any aspect of the activity by showing compassion, respect and unconditional positive regard. Encourage appropriate discussion throughout the activity and if a group member finishes their activity early, suggest they choose another activity.

Chain of Change

Answer the questions on the corresponding strips of colored paper to create a Chain of Change.

- Blue: What has changed in your family?
- Green: What has changed at work/school?
- Red: How have your relationships changed?
- Pink: What has changed about your daily life?
- Purple: What do you wish were different?
- Orange: What was especially hard for you?
- Yellow: How has this changed you?
Imagine that your foster child writes you a letter in the future after leaving your house. What would it say?
Dear Foster Parent,

I know you are million miles away from where I am.
And it's taking much too long for me to write.
But the words I've tried to find within me time and time again
Hit me like a hurricane tonight.
And this is what my heart begin to write.

You gave me laughter, you shared my tears.
Your love for me took away my fears.
You gave me courage to follow the truth.
And for all your love, I thank you.

As I look back on my yesterdays, the times I spent alone.
In the darkness I was standing on the edge.
It was you who made the choice.
To save a life beyond your own.
You stood by me while others walked away.
And you're the reason I am here today.

You gave me laughter, you shared my tears.
Your love for me took away my fears.
You gave me courage to follow the truth.
And for all your love, I thank you.

Love, Your Foster Child