

# When Children are Placed in Foster Care...



When children are removed from their families due to abuse and/or neglect there are five emotions that most children who are in foster care typically experience:

**Confusion**-during this state the child has a lot of unanswered questions. Most children are in shock and may not be able to hear or comprehend explanations given to him or her. The child is unlikely to verbalize confusion, but we should assume he or she is experiencing it.

**Anger**-When a child recovers from the shock of the move, the child is most likely to feel angry. The anger may be directed towards themselves, the foster or adoptive family, the caseworker or others. Most children cannot acknowledge anger towards their parents. At times the child may make an angry statement about his parents. While it is important not to agree with them, it is critical to acknowledge how the child is feeling.

**Ambivalence and mixed feelings**-The mixed feelings that a child may experience can range from rejection and attachment, love and hate, trust and mistrust. Most children have mixed feelings about everyone involved in their lives during this time.

**Fantasizing and wishful thinking**-The truth about what has happened in the life of a child in foster care can be painful and overwhelming. Therefore, it is easy to see how a child can fantasize. At times the child may seem that they are lying about their situation, but the story they tell may simply be wishful thinking, or the child's lack of understanding about the situation.

**Identification with birth family**-Despite all the feelings described above the child will always have identification and a longing to be with his or her family. Even if they were living in an abusive or neglectful situation most children would like to return to live with their family.

## Suggestions for Helping a Child with...

### Confusion

- Give factual information about the child's situation
- Retain as much of child's old schedule as possible
- Use stories, dolls, puppets, and pictures to explain
- Be aware of child's attention span
- Be non-judgmental

### Anger

- Teach acceptable ways to express anger
- Evaluate your acceptance of angry feelings
- Get support from caseworker, other foster parents, and GAL (Guardian ad Litem)

### Ambivalence and mixed feelings

- Teach that ambivalence is natural
- Encourage positive feelings while acknowledging negative feelings

### Fantasizing and wishful thinking

- Consider that the child may be fantasizing instead of lying
- Give factual information
- Be aware of reactions of other children in the home
- Agree that it would be nice if the fantasy were true, if a positive fantasy
- Check with the caseworker about the facts of the situation about which the child is fantasizing

(Continued on the back...)

*Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers*

Continued.....

# When Children are Placed in Foster Care...

## **Identification**

- Support family ties when possible
- Learn about the child's family traditions and incorporate them into yours if possible
- Get pictures of the child's family for his/her room, cubby etc.
- Help the child to remember family birthdays, and special occasions
- Point out positive ways in which the child is like family members
- Don't change hairstyles without permission from the primary parent
- Keep the child's old clothes, if possible.
- Keep the child's given name (in adoption)

Remember to partner with others involved in the child's care.

- The GAL (Guardian ad Litem) office ensures that the Department of Social Services (DSS)-which has custody of children in care- is truly advocating for the best interest and rights of the child.
- Child care providers need to make sure that children are not allowed to be removed from their programs during key time like lunch, nap, and other special times. The GAL office can assist with ensuring that DSS does what is in the best interest of the child when it come to school/child care schedules.
- Children in care are transported to various appointments and visits at the convenience of the caseworker or technicians assigned the task and a child's best interest may be overlooked.
- A constant disruption in the child's schedule can be harmful and the child may begin to exhibit challenging behaviors such as aggression and negative emotional coping.
- Make sure that DSS is aware of the child's schedule and upcoming field trips and special activities. Children that are not allowed to participate in fun activities may exhibit challenging behaviors.

Adapted from <http://www.cwti.org/FF/resourcesess5.htm>

