



Katie Rhodes Consulting
Helping you help others

ABILITY TO HANDLE CHALLENGING SITUATIONS IN FOSTERING AND RETENTION

Foster Family Treatment Association
Conference on Treatment Foster Care

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Presenters

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Research Collaborators

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- Casey Family Programs
 - <http://www.casey.org/>
 - <http://www.fosterfamilyassessments.org>



Learning Objectives

- Describe the challenges of fostering and the problem of retaining qualified parents
- Describe findings from research on the ability to handle challenges and retention
- Highlight measures from the *Casey Foster Family Assessments* to assess foster parents' potential and their abilities to handle challenges
- Identify resources to learn more about assessing foster parents and foster parent retention



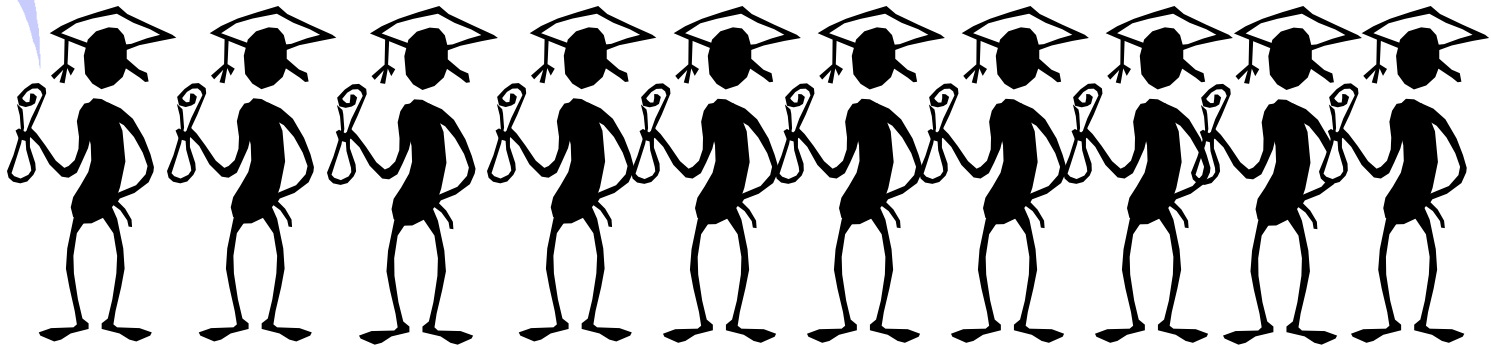
Foster/Pre-Adoptive Families

- Care for 74% of the 513,000 children in foster care
 - 236,775 (Non-relative)
 - 124,153 (Relative)
 - 18,691 (Pre-adoptive)

(DHHS, 2005)



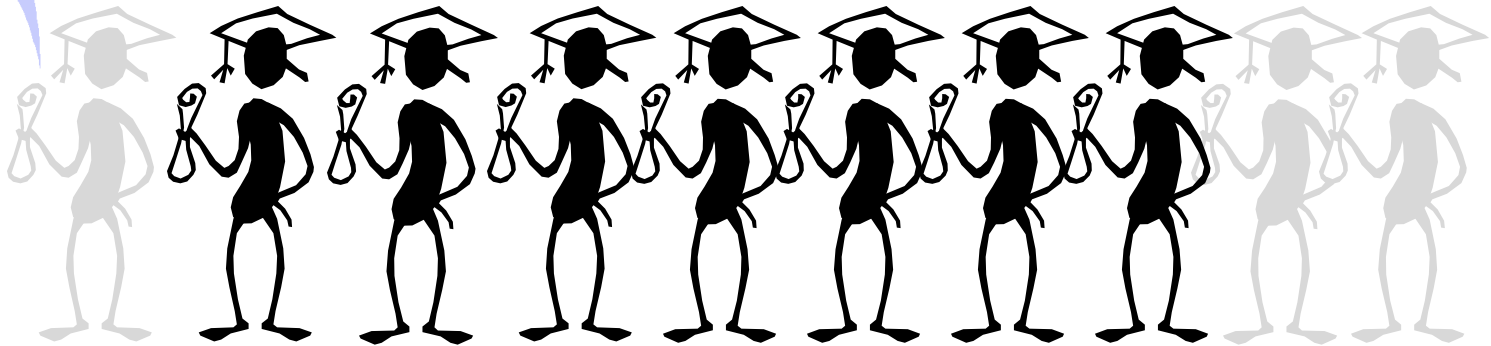
Foster Parent Retention



Newly Licensed Foster Parents



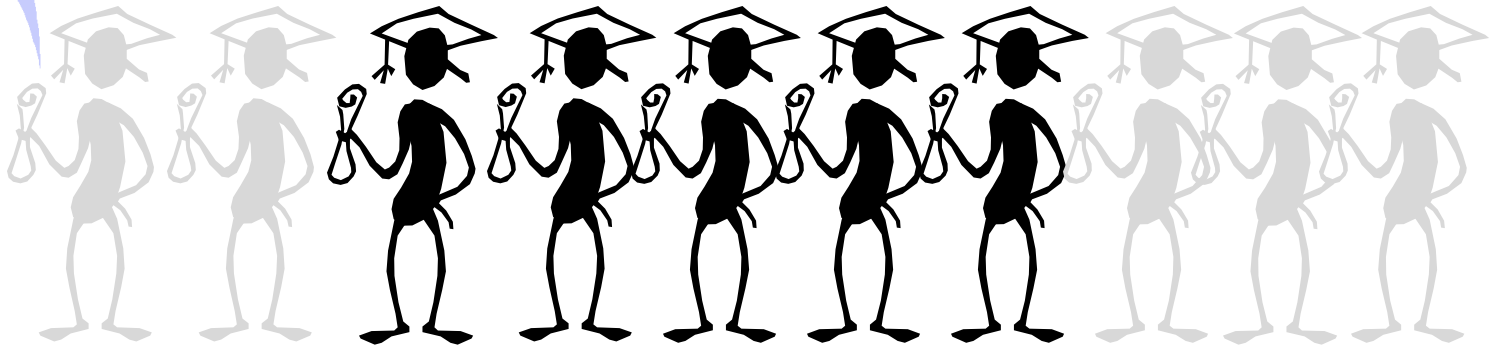
Six Months



1/4 have dropped out



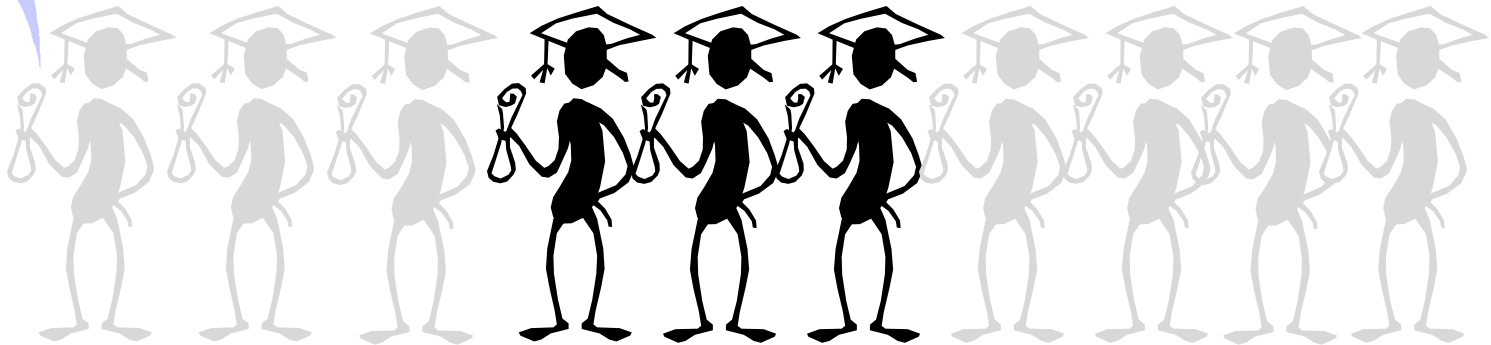
One Year



1/2 have left foster care



Two Years



Less than 1/3 of homes are in service



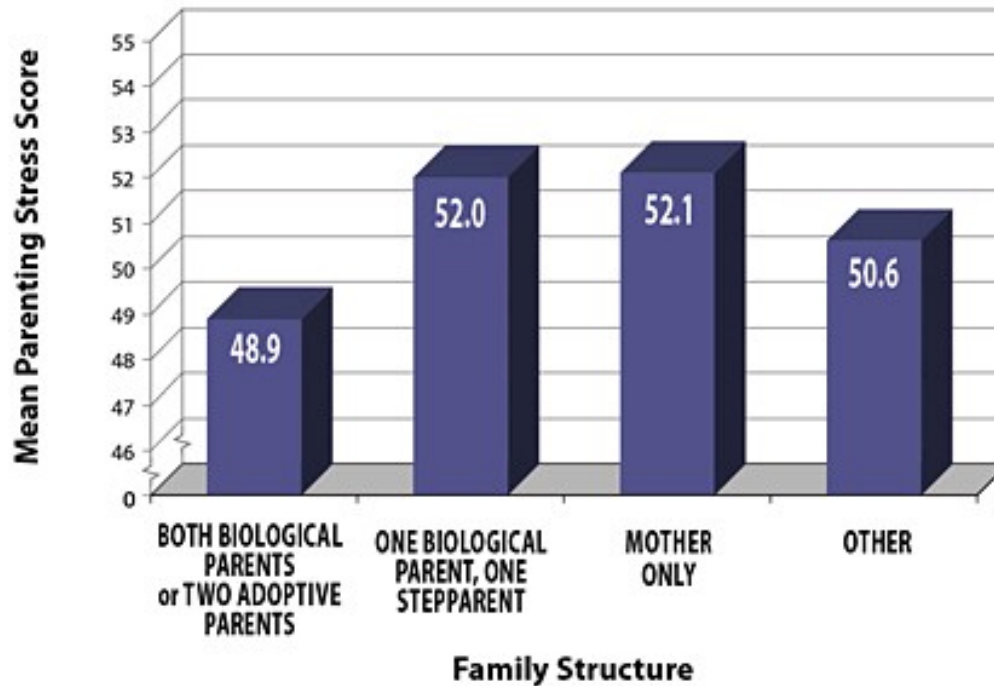
Placement Stability

- 1/4 of placement changes are initiated by foster parents
- Frequent placement disruptions lead in foster parents quitting
 - Foster parents with more placements may be less committed to a child
 - Over stretching coping abilities may encourage isolation and detachment



Parenting Stress

Parenting Stress by Family Structure



Source: National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)



What Is Most Challenging For Parents?

- A. Finances
- B. Children's health and safety
- C. Work



Parent Survey On Stress

- Children's health and safety (32%)
- Finances (23%)
- Work (21%)
- Finding child care (21%)
- Dealing with at-risk behaviors (13%)
- Lack of control over time (12%)
- Relationships with spouse and others (12%)
- Child concerns about family problems* (17%)

LifeCare, Inc. 2005

*Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2006



Add To The Mix.....

- Bureaucratic red tape
- Child's unfamiliar behaviors
- Unplanned departures
- Birth family interactions
- Risk of abuse accusations
- Tug of love cases
- Stresses on family relationships



Challenging Events In Foster Care

- 1/4 of foster parents report experiencing stressful and challenging events weekly



Questions ?

- Do foster parents with greater ability to handle typical foster care challenges:
 - Foster longer?
 - Request fewer removals?
 - Foster fewer children?



Research Design

- Part of larger study of parental and familial characteristics of foster families
- Cross-sectional, national survey
- Licensed foster mothers
- Recruited through foster parent associations, but not limited to membership in foster parent associations
- N = 296 foster mothers from private and public agencies in 35 states



Variables

- Ability to handle challenges
 - Casey Foster Challenges Interview (FCI)
- Length of service
 - Number of years fostered
- Placement stability
 - Number of placement changes made at foster parent request
 - Number of children fostered



Casey Foster Challenges Interview

- Based on real-life situations that call for a definite and specific response
 - Presents hypothetical dilemmas
 - Quantifies response to allow comparison
- Anchored rating scale ranging from 1-5
 - (1) poor (3) good (5) excellent
- Vignette scores add together for a total interview score



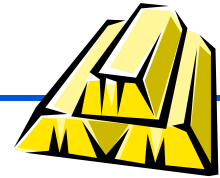
Best Practice For Handling Challenges “Gold Standard”



- Put safety first!
- Nurture through bonding
- See health and development needs
- Talk with child about feelings and sensitive issues
- Approach problems flexibly, see beyond behaviors, model behaviors



Best Practice Cont.



- Value diversity
- Help child work through processes with birth family
- Promote permanency
- Work with the agency
- See how fostering can effect individual and family
- Have ideas for self-care



Demographics Of The Sample

- Most were European-American
- Most were married
- Most had completed at least some college
- 1/3 worked full-time
- 1/3 homemaker
- Median family income was \$50,000



Foster Challenges Interview

- Mean = 2.97 (“Good” response)
- SD = .63



Length of Service

- Ranged from 1 to 30 years
- Median = 5 years

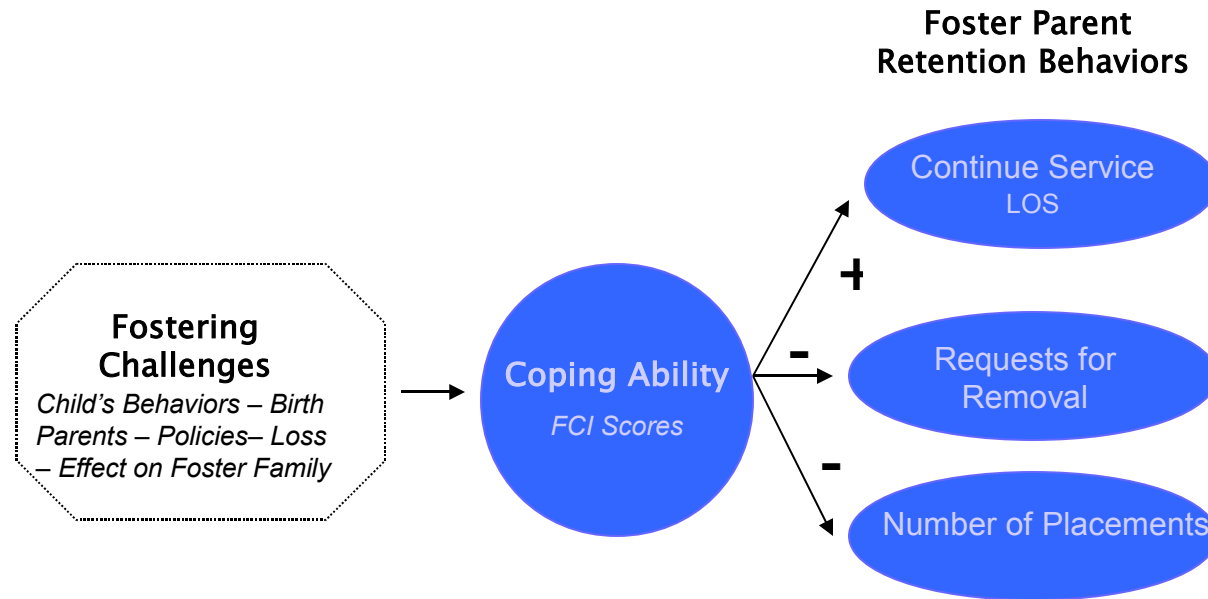


Placement Stability

- Number of children fostered per year as a foster parent
 - Median = 11 (*IQR* = 4.00 – 30.00)
- Number of requests for removal per year as a foster parent
 - Median = 1 (*IQR* = 0 – 3.00)



Ability To Handle Challenges



- Mothers with higher FCI scores
 - Fostered longer
 - Requested fewer removals
 - Fostered fewer children



What Mothers Said Helped Them Handle Challenges

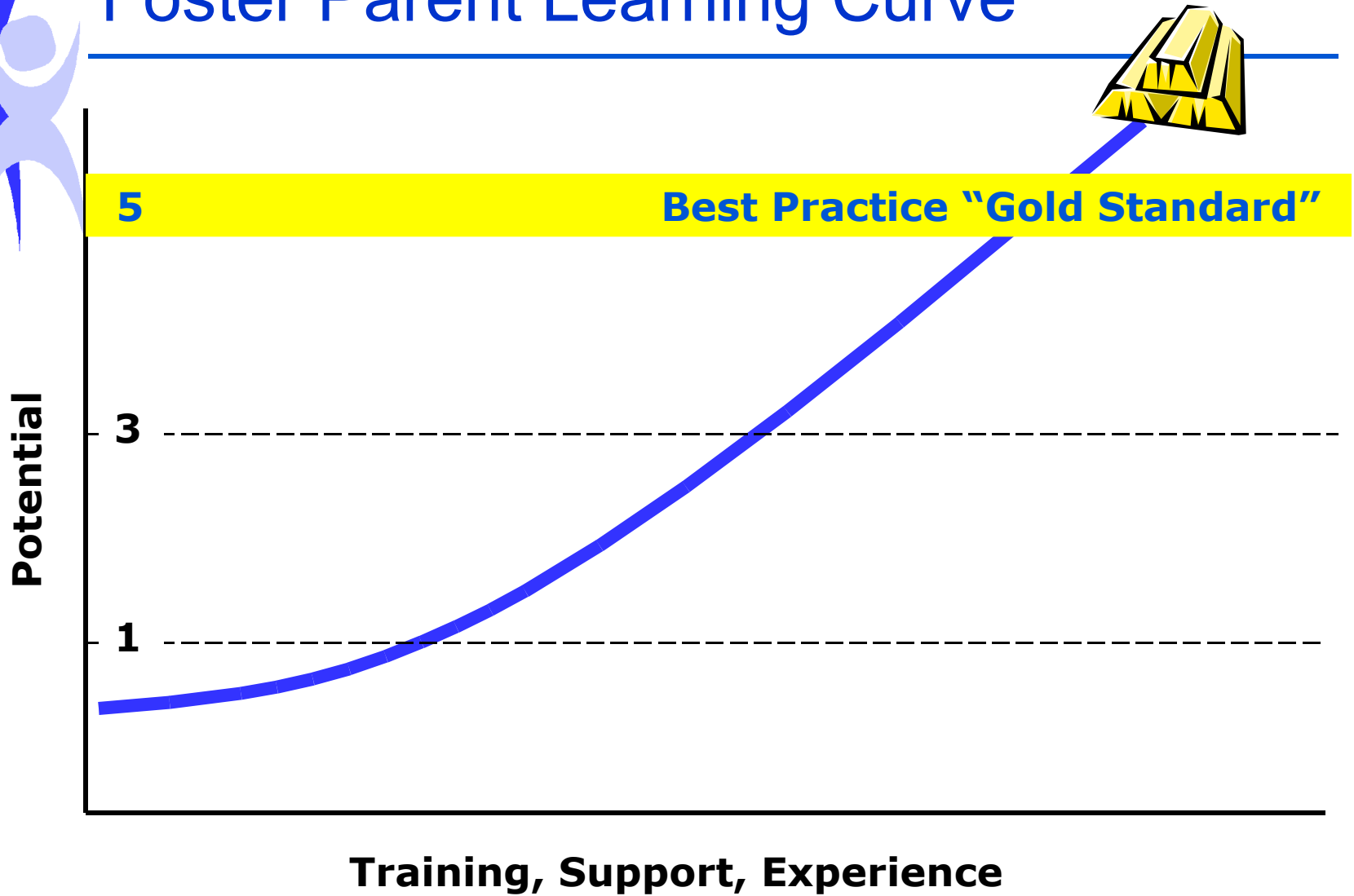
- Having frequent contact with worker
- Trusting that help is available when she needs it
- Knowing that her worker will advocate for the child and for her
- Being part of a support group
- Believing she makes a difference



Using the Foster Challenges Interview In Practice

- Select one of 3 interview sets
 - 6 vignettes for single parents
 - 7th vignette for partnered parents
- Have an individual interview
 - Present vignettes
 - Write down responses verbatim
- Score responses
 - Refer to scoring guidelines

Foster Parent Learning Curve





Activity

- Read vignette 1.2
- Read the response in the “Activity” box on page 2 of the Conspectus
- As a group, use the scoring guide on Handout 1 to assign a rating to the response

The child in your care slowly has improved behaviors since coming to live with you.



You observe that she is upset and her behaviors with you are worse after she visits with her birth mother.



It takes days of
your time and
attention for
her behavior to
return to "normal."



What do you do?





Response

"I would try to find out what she is doing while she is with her mom. Is her mom there? Is she spending time with her? Is she scared of something when she is with her mom?"

I would try to get her back into our routine right away. I would remind her of our family rules and the expectations she is to follow with us.

I would praise her for the progress she is making and caution her about making bad decisions like her mom has made. I'd focus on her goals and remind her about what she can earn for being good.

I would tell her worker that she is upset. He can talk with her next time he comes. Maybe he can find out what is wrong from her mom's worker.

I would plan something special for her after visits such as fixing her favorite meal or going out for a treat to let her know how much we want her here".

1.2. The child in your care slowly has improved behavior since coming to live with you. You observe that the child is upset and behaviors with you are worse after visits with the birth parent. It takes several days of your time and attention for the child's behavior to "return to normal." What do you do?

RESPONSE CHARACTERISTICS

1

- Compares their care with care provided by birth parents
- Tells child that interactions with birth parents are not good for them
- Uses punishment to respond to child's behaviors
- Focuses what birth parent might be doing to the child
- Suggests discontinuing visits since the child is upset

Or

- Expects child's behavior will be negative following visits so does not recognize a problem or take action
- Takes a "go with the flow" parenting style – recognizes a problem but see need to take action

3

- Maintains connection with child
- Focuses on child's behavior
- Points out problem to the child
- Expresses concern about the changes in child's behavior
- Continues to work with child on improving behaviors
- Uses positive rewards for acceptable behavior after visits
- Looks for possible problems during visits that might be upsetting the child
- Suggests that visits be limited or supervised to minimize disruption for the child

5

- Maintains connection with child while addressing issues of separation and loss
- Understands the importance of visits for the child
- Recognizes impact of separation and loss on child's behavior and how children express feelings of loss
- Recognizes the child's connection with birth parents and how feelings of loss can affect behavior
- Sees behavioral changes as a reaction to separation and loss issues and is not discouraged
- Thinks about how expectations may differ in light of loss issues
- Talks openly to child about difficult emotional issues to help child deal with feelings associated with loss, loyalty, and attachment
- Seeks help and support from worker
- Involves worker to help child and birth parents
- Suggests strategies to strengthen the child's sense of security such as facilitating visits with the birth parent or structuring visits to assure they are useful

1

2

3

4

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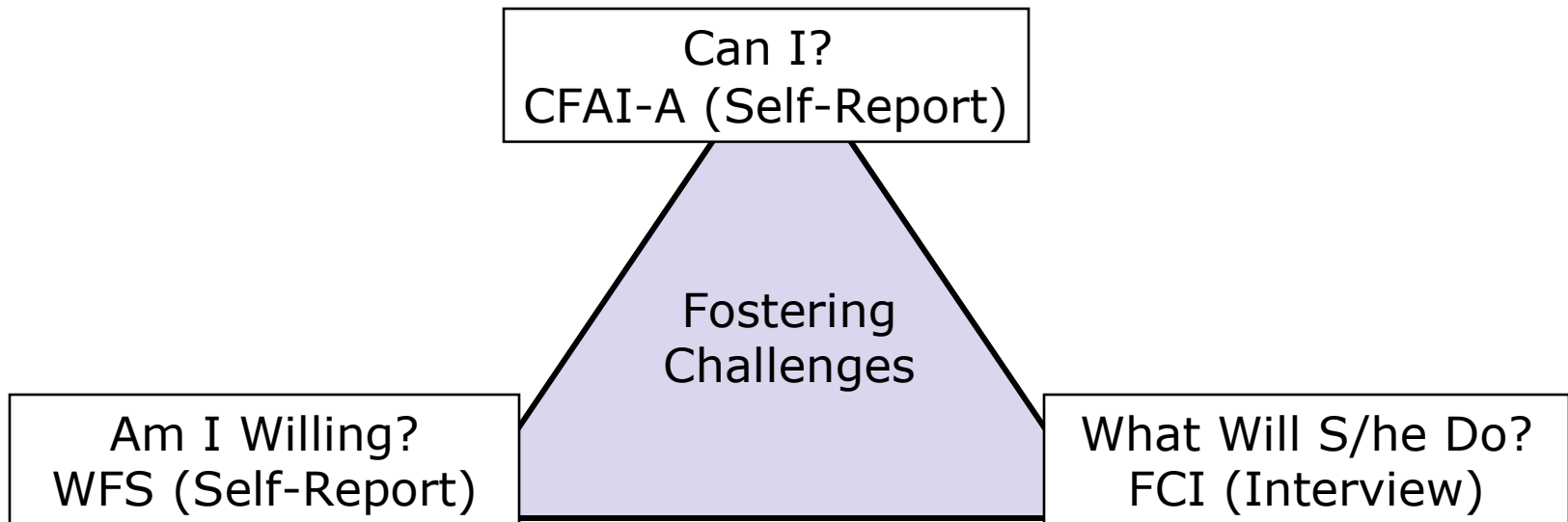
What To Do With FCI Scores

- Open discussion about strengths and areas for growth
- Clarify agency's philosophy, mission, policies, and practices
- Identify topic areas for sharing more information through regular meetings and training opportunities
- Recognize “teachable moments”



Complementary CFFA Tools

- Casey Foster Applicant Inventory
- Willingness to Foster Scale





CFAI Challenging Children Subscale

- I can foster a child who steals
- I can foster a child who uses bad language, such as dirty words for body parts and sex
- I can foster a child who doesn't respect people's privacy
- I can foster a child who lies about everything
- I can foster a child who says mean and hurtful things to me
- I can foster a child who has lots of bad habits
- I can foster a child who has a really bad temper 1
- I can foster a child who is mean or cruel to a lot of people
- I can be a good foster parent to a young teen who is sexually active
- I'm able to foster a child who rejects me
- I can be a good foster parent to a child who is gay or lesbian
- *I can't foster a child who doesn't try at all in school
- *I can't foster a child who masturbates

*Reverse scored items

List of Scales

Willingness to Foster Scale (WFS)

Lots of foster children have emotional or behavioral problems. As you think about what kinds of children would be a good match for your family, it will help to think about what kinds of emotional or behavior problems you can handle. Below is a list of problems that children in foster care might have. Please use the scale provided to indicate what types of children you are willing to foster in your home.



Willingness To Foster Scale

Emotional and Behavioral Problems Subscale

	Mother	Father	
SCORE (1-4)			
1=Would not be willing to foster under any circumstances			1. Child who argues a lot with me
2=Might be willing to foster with a lot of help and support			2. Child who is suicidal or wants to hurt himself/herself
3=Probably be willing to foster with a little extra help and support			3. Child who steals
4=Would be willing to foster without any extra help or support			4. Child who physically attacks others
			5. Child who doesn't obey me
			6. Child who gets into trouble at school
			7. Child who threatens others
			8. Child who is disrespectful
			9. Child who lies
			10. Child who is very secretive
			11. Child who destroys the property of others
			12. Child who masturbates
			13. Child who doesn't do well in school
			14. Child who is restless or cannot sit still
			15. Child who fights with other children
			16. Child who rejects me
			17. Child who is cruel or mean to others
			18. Child who skips school
			19. Child who cannot concentrate or cannot pay attention for long
			20. Child who is very quiet and withdrawn
	Mother	Father	
SCORE (1-4)			
1=Would not be willing to foster under any circumstances			21. Child who wets the bed
2=Might be willing to foster with a lot of help and support			22. Child who is sexually active
3=Probably be willing to foster with a little extra help and support			23. Child who uses drugs or alcohol
4=Would be willing to foster without any extra help or support			24. Child who sets fires
			25. Child who swears or uses foul language
			26. Child who is cruel to animals
			27. Child who demands a lot of attention
			28. Child who has sudden changes in mood or feelings
			29. Child who doesn't get along with other children (Child has difficulty making/keeping friends)
			30. Child who feels worthless or inferior
			31. Child who threatens to run away
			32. Child who affiliates with gangs (e.g. skinheads, cults).
			33. Child who has a bad temper
			34. Child who doesn't feel guilty after misbehaving
			35. Child who imitates sexual acts
			36. Child who smokes
			37. Child who has bad table manners
			38. Child who is very manipulative
			39. Child who has poor hygiene
			40. Child who is a juvenile sex offender
bh			



Complementary CFFA Assessments Cont.

- Stressors
 - CES-Depression Scale
 - Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test
 - Social Readjustment Rating Scale
 - Short Hardiness Scale
- Social Support
 - Help With Fostering Scale



CFFA Measures

- Free for agencies to use
- Families can enter on line
- Casey Family Programs
 - <http://www.casey.org/>
 - <http://www.fosterfamilyassessments.org>
- Casey can provide aggregate agency data on request