

# **CLINICAL ISSUES AND INTERVENTION**

**WITH**

**RELATIVE CAREGIVERS**

**Presented by**

**Dr. Joseph Crumbley, LCSW**

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Phone #: 215-884-7889  
E-mail: office @drcrumbely.com  
Website: [www.drcrumbley.com](http://www.drcrumbley.com)

## 1. Loss

- interruption of life-cycle
- future plans
- space, privacy
- priorities
- change in relationship

## Goals and Intervention

- coping with the loss
- determine thresholds for loss
- it's OK to say no

## Strategies

- inventory of losses
  - loss/change
  - benefits
  - benefits outweigh loss
  - live with losses
  - “When enough is enough”
  - “You have to be OK for the child to be OK”
  - “It’s OK to say no, if you’re hurting yourself or can’t give the child what they need”

## 2. Role/Boundary Redefinition (with child and birth parent)

- from supportive to primary caregiver
- from advisor to decision-maker
- from friend to authority

### Goals

1. re-framing and redefining
  - roles
  - responsibilities
  - interactions
  - relations

## Strategies

- who's responsible for what?
- How do roles & responsibilities change?
- Does everyone support the changes?
- Share with the child

### 3. **Guilt**

- fearful of contributing to family disruption
- becoming a primary caregiver and raising child
- more committed to meeting the child's needs rather than the birth parents
- being successful with the child
- the child becoming attached to the relative rather than the birth parent
- being a better parent or relative to the birth child than to the birth parent

## Goals

- living with the guilt
- forgiving themselves
- accepting new roles

## Strategies

- acknowledge
- validate
- what will I do different
- what mistakes were made
- right to make mistakes

## Strategies

- mistakes are part of learning
- not expecting or waiting for forgiveness from others
- forgiving self leads to resilience
- then you can develop resilience within the child
- “Should I let the child call me mom or dad? Should I let the child attach to me as a parent?”
- “What do children need (now)”
- “Who’s going to meet their needs (now)”
- “If not you, then who?”

#### 4. Embarrassment

- due to birth parent's inability to remain primary caregiver
- having to ask for services or assistance (i.e., financial)
- being involved with public or private agencies (i.e., family court, public assistance, child welfare)
- having to disclose negative information about the birth parent or family during legal or financial proceedings (i.e., petition for custody)
- the reason why the child is being placed or raised by relatives instead of their parents
- having to explain to the child why they're living with relatives and not their parents and siblings
- having to explain to friends or relatives "where are the parents"

#### Goals

- coping
- de-mystifying the systems

## Strategies

- acknowledge and validate feelings
- educate relative caregiver to systems/procedures/policies/reaction and how to respond
- disclosure (also taught to child)
  - what
  - who
  - when
  - how much
- how you can support
  - facilitate
  - coordinate
  - accompany
  - behind the scene

## 5. Projection/Transference

- unresolved issues with birth parent transferred to child
- difficulty perceiving the child's personality as different from their birth parent

### Goals

- empower the relative caregiver
- believe the child can make choices

## Strategies

- what were the birth parents' good at/talents
- what is the birth child good at/talents
- what experiences or opportunities could have caused the birth parent to be different
- what experiences and opportunities do the children need in order to be different from their birth parents
- what are you going to do differently for the birth child
- will doing these things be difficult for you

## 6. Loyalty

- trying not to usurp or replace birth parent's role
- split loyalties and dual loyalties to both the birth parents and the birth child
- feeling disloyal by placing birth child's need before the birth parents
- feeling as if betraying the birth parent is disclosing negative information about them to other's or agencies

## Goals

- prioritizing loyalties and responsibilities
- not infantilizing the birth parent

## Strategies

- who is less able to help themselves
- Whose turn is it now
- You may lose both if you try to save both
- Who deserves your help first
- Who's turn is it now
- Who does the agency need to see you caring for first, if you want to keep the child

## 7. Child-Rearing Practicing

- updating and recalling techniques and methods
- shared child rearing (i.e., birth parents, maternal/paternal extended family)
- the use of medication or involvement therapy
- raising children with special needs issues (i.e., medical or emotional, PTSD, ADHD, Oppositional Defiant, medical, fragile)
- educational challenges (i.e., new math)
- involvement with agencies in decision-making and for approvals

### Goals

- trial and error
- matching desired behavioral outcomes with parenting approaches

## Strategies

- “let’s try it your way. If it does not work then let’s try this ....”
  - set out the criteria
  - how you will measure outcomes
  - alternative plan
  - timetable
- “What type of skills and qualities do you want your child to have?”
  - be a leader not a follower
  - think for themselves
  - to question and problem solve
  - feel their opinion is as good as anyone else’s
  - have the confidence to voice their opinion or disagreement

## Strategies

- “Who’s going to help your child practice and develop these skills?”
- “Are you allowing your child to (in a respectful way) practice:
  - questioning with you
  - expressing their opinion with you
  - problem-solving with you
  - debating or disagreeing with you

## 8. Stress Management/Physical Limitations

- developing coping skills and support in managing children and additional responsibilities

### Goals

- identifying limits
- identifying support

### Strategies

- resources
- people
- second care provider
- schedules/routines/activities

## 9. Bonding and Attaching

- establishing a parent/child relationship instead of a relative/child relationship

### Goals

- establish new attachments/and roles

## Strategies

- earn versus ascribed
  - loyalty
  - trust
  - intimacy
  - affection
  - bonding
- you don't know me as a parent
- these are the things I will do to earn your trust and show you I deserve it
- these are the things you will need to do to earn my trust and show me you deserve it
- sharing loss and grief issues with the child is a bonding and attachment process, because they only share with you

## 10. Anger and Resentment

- birth parent's absent
- birth parent's attempts to regain custody or continue contact
- birth parent's sabotage for competition
- agencies and professional
- with "themselves" for becoming a surrogate parent

### Goals

- cope with the anger
- no anger displaced onto child

## Strategies

- “Yes you are being used but you are helping the child” (rationale)
- “If not you, then who” (rationale)
- place anger where it belongs
- role playing
- support group

## 11. Morbidity and Mortality

- planning for the child's continued care in case of their illness or death due to aging
- developing respite of secondary caretakers

### Goals

- develop morbidity/mortality plan

### Strategies

- family group conference
- who will be available
- when will it be necessary
- share plans and arrangements with the child

## 12. Fantasies

- parent/child reunification

### Goals

- develop alternative plan
- develop concurrent plan

### Strategies (also taught to the child) if not, then what

- alternative plan
- when will the plan be implemented
- timetable
- how many chances before the implementation of the plan ....

### 13. Overcompensation

- attempts to make up for the child's losses neglect or abuse
- atone for birth parent's inadequate parenting
- atone for not adequately parenting or being a supportive relative to the birth parent

#### Goals

- balance
- avoid extreme reactions

#### Strategies

- what does the child need
- how to meet the child's needs
- what did they miss
- how do you balance what was missed

## 14. Competition

- with birth parent for child loyalty
- with professionals

### Goals

- develop an hierarchy of authority and criteria for how privileges are earned
- don't compete or by love, affection or respect

### Strategies

- when you're with me these are the rules
- when you are with your parents' you follow their rules (unless there are safety issues relating to those rules)

## 15. Intrusion

- home studies
- evaluations
- invasion of privacy
- disclosures

### Goals

- help relative caregiver
- survive the intervention

### Strategies

- “These are things we need to do together so that I can report that the child is safe with you.”
- “.... Or show it’s in the child’s best interest to be with you so that we can get out of your life.”