

**KINSHIP CARE:**

**CLINICAL ISSUES AND INTERVENTION**

**WITH BIRTH PARENTS**

**Presented by**

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# Clinical Issues for the Birth Parent

## 1. Loss/Separation

- Purpose, role, relationship
- Emotional detachment
- Disorientation, confusion

## Intervention

### Goals:

- To cope and adjust to losses and separation
- Avoid future situations resulting in losses
- Staying child focus

## Strategies

- Acknowledge/validate feelings
  - of loss/grief separation
  - as a parent “I believe you love and miss your child”
  - ask family member (i.e., son/daughter)
- engage in a loss/grief process
  - denial, anger, guilt, mourning, acceptance, re-direction
- identify what situations, decisions or behaviors to avoid in order to avoid further losses
- establish a network to utilize as support throughout the separation/loss/grief process
- living with losses and separation by “knowing you put your child’s needs first, before your own needs and painful losses”

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

- From primary caregiver to supported
- From decision-maker to advisor
- From authority to relative

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Redefining roles, boundaries and relationships with the child and relative caregiver
- Supporting the child and caregiver in their new relationship

## Strategies

- Acknowledge loss/grief feelings
- Acknowledge power/impact on child, caregiver and family
- Determine whether power/influence is going to be used positively or negatively and to whose benefit
- “Of course it hurts; your his mother”
- “You have the power to make these changes work”
- “Your child need to hear you say, it’s OK, or listen to her aunt”
- “Who would you rather be caring for your child if you can’t; a family member, friend or foster parent”
- “Would you rather be in part of your child’s life or not at all if you’re a negative influence”
- “Will you use your influence to help her adjust to end up in placement”

### 3. **Guilt/Low Self-Esteem**

- Failure as a parent
- Failure as a family member (i.e., son/daughter/sibling)

#### Intervention

#### Goals:

- How to love/cope with guilt
- Re-build self-esteem
- How to forgive oneself

## Strategies

- Acknowledge/validate/normalize feelings
- Accept responsibilities and acknowledge mistakes “Yes I made mistakes”
- Give self-permission to learn and be human “I’m only human, which doesn’t justify my mistakes, but I have the right to learn from my mistakes, just like everyone else”
- How to earn self-respect and forgiveness by learning and doing things different “You can’t change the past, now what will you do different, so you won’t make the same mistake again”
- Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes
- Not expect or wait for other’s forgiveness, in order to forgive yourself

## 4. Embarrassment

- Embarrassment with child, extended family and in community for being a failure
- Having to explain to the child, family and friends why the child is not living with their parent
- Making appearances in court or public agencies
- Child not accepting or responding to their parents' authority or affection
- Being rejecting or belittles by family members
- Criminal or stigmatizing labels (i.e., abusive/neglectful/substance abuser)

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Coping with the embarrassment
- Maintaining self-esteem
- De-mystify systems

## Strategies

- anticipate possible public responses people or agencies
- develop repertoire or responses
  - avoid/ignore
  - respond
  - elicit support (i.e., authorities, legal assistance)
  - set limits (i.e., not allow legal rights being violated)
- scripting responses for the child family and friends
  - who deserves explanations
  - what to explain
  - how much to explain
  - when to explain
- defining supportive roles from others
  - accompany
  - coordinate/facilitate
  - advocate
  - distant support
  - informational/educational
- developing uniform script with caregivers when explaining to the child

## 5. Projection/Transference

- Unresolved issues of transferred to relative caregiver
- Projecting feelings about relative caregiver onto child

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- resolving issues with the caregiver
- not projecting feelings onto the child

### Strategies

- acknowledge past issues exist
- identify with the caregiver how not to repeat the past/"what needs to be done different in the present"
- identify with the caregiver how not to repeat past incidents with the child
- what about the past is appropriate or inappropriate to share or discuss in front of the child

## 6. Sabotage/Competition

- Undermining relative/child relationship and relative caregiver authority
- Triangulating child resulting in split loyalties

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Supporting new relationships
- Allow child to develop new loyalties and relationships
- Remaining child focus

### Strategies

- Acknowledge/validate loss and grief
- Impact of power/influence; how will it be used
- “If not you; then who should the child trust and be loyal to”
- how to give child permission to re-direct loyalty
- why to avoid buying the child’s loyalty “What are you teaching your child about love and loyalty is earned”
- how to avoid creating a manipulative child by making caregiver and parents compete with each other (i.e., “out do each other”)

## 7. Fantasy

- Reunification with child
- Difficult accepting limits, need for respite help or surrogate caregiver for child

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Accepting the child's current reality
- Meeting their current expectations
- Focusing on themselves and stabilizing their current reality separate from the child

## Strategies

- “You have to show you can take care of yourself, before taking care of others”
- “You have to show you can put your child’s needs before your own, even if it’s painful for you”
- avoid making promises you might not be able to keep
- script circumstances with the children that are presently oriented: “Right now what you need to do in school, or with your aunt at home . . .” “I’m planning for us to be a family again, but right now I have to first . . .”

## 8. Anger and Resentment

- With relative caregiver for becoming the surrogate parent
- With agency or professionals for removing the child
- With birth child for becoming attached with relative caregiver or professionals

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Not displace anger or resentment onto the child or relative caregiver
- Find appropriate ways and outlets for feelings

## Strategies

- Acknowledge/validate feelings
- Revisit mistakes/personal responsibilities
- Consequences of and impact on goals (i.e., reunification with child)
- Identify how power/influence is being used
- Revisit methods of building self-esteem and feeling better about self
- Discuss how, when, where and to whom anger should be displayed and consequences
- Identify warning and prevention system
- Develop support network

## 9. Disloyalty/Rejection/Betrayal

- By birth parent for attachment, loyalty or success with the relative caregiver or professional
- By child's disclosure or events while living with birth parent
- With relative for making child's needs a priority over the birth parents
- With relatives for disclosing information with agencies that is negative or damaging
- With relatives for pursuing custody or adoption

### Intervention

#### Goals:

- Re-connect with family members, loyal and committed to keeping the child in the family and maintaining parent/child involvement

## Strategies

- Identify the individuals essential to the parent's connection with and care of the child. "Despite past loyalties, who has remained committed to caring for your child, so that he is not in foster care"
- "They may not have been loyal to you, but they have remained loyal and committed to your child not being placed in foster care or adoption"
- "Those in authority needed to see your family show loyalty to whom first; you or the child?"
- "In order to keep your child out of foster care, who would you have wanted your family to show loyalty to first; you or your child?"

## CONDITIONS REQUIRING BIRTH PARENT'S SUPPORT

1. Acknowledgment/Validation of Relative Authority
  - “Your aunt and uncle are now responsible for taking care of you”
  - “They’re going to be able to take good care of you and be there when you need them”
  
2. Differ Authority to the Relative Caregiver
  - “They’re going to take care and protect you the same way I would”
  - “When they speak, they speak for me”
  
3. Give Child Permission to Accept Their Relative’s Authority
  - “I want you to trust and obey them, the same way you would trust and listen to me”

#### 4. Be Consistent

- “The same rules you follow in their home are the same rules you’ll follow when you’re with me”
- “We both want what’s good for you and for you to be happy and safe”

#### 5. Give Child Permission to Bond with and Trust Their Caregiver

- “I want you to ask for help with problems the same way you asked me”
- “You can trust them to help you and care for you the same way I love you”

## **CAREGIVER STATEMENTS/DIALOGUE WITH THE BIRTH PARENT**

1. “It will mean more to the children of what they hear you say . . . “
2. “The children need to know that it’s OK with you before they will . . . “
3. “Your child will feel better if you say . . . “
4. “The children will listen a lot better to me or their teacher if you tell them . . . “
5. “They’ll trust me more if you say . . . “

These types of statements by the caregiver reunite a shared parenting relationship with the birth parent by:

- validating the birth parent’s role with the child
- acknowledging the birth parent’s influence and significance as a parent
- re-defines a collaborative relationship between the birth parent and relative caregiver