

Multiple topics

Working with family members

This learning activity supports:

- Topic 2: Attachment theory
- Topic 9: Communicating effectively with children and young people
- Topic 10: Multidisciplinary working
- Topic 14: Placement stability and permanence
- Topic 15: Managing risk and benefits of contact
- Topic 16: Working with birth parents

This exercise has been adapted from the Fostering Now Fostering Service Development Exercises¹.

Methods

Suitable for a group exercise in a facilitated workshop.

Learning Outcome

- To enable practitioners to analyse areas of practice relating to the involvement of families.
- To empathise with family members who lack power.
- To explore processes for promoting involvement.

Time Required

90 minutes including:

- 20 minutes to read the case study and consider the questions,
- 30 minutes to role play a meeting,
- 30 minutes feedback in role,
- 10 minutes summarising key learning points and actions.

Process – Role-play of a meeting of the team around the child Introduction

Some [parents] may feel a sense of relief. They may have been at the end of their tether. Even in these cases, however, there are likely to be mixed emotions, feelings of loss, a sense of failure, a worry about how the event can be presented at school or to the neighbours, a concern about how their child may do when away from them and about whether he or she will cease to love them or fail to return.

A quarter of the children already knew their carers. Where they did not, pre-placement meetings took place in only half the cases. The parents (or at least the mothers, for social workers rarely worked with fathers) welcomed these, although some felt ill-prepared, inadequate or excluded, or that decisions had been made prior to the meeting. If they did not know the foster carers, they rarely met them in advance, although most would have liked to do this.

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Fostering Now: Messages from Research (Sinclair 2005: 61-62)

Sharing the task of caring for children is not easy; parents and foster carers often approach the parenting task differently, leading to tensions in the relationship. The research suggests that acknowledging the feelings and views of parents, and actively involving them in the placement, can be a very positive step.

For this part of the exercise, use the case study for Dillon or a scenario that addresses issues that are relevant to the team or group.

Activity set up

Allocate the following roles to members of the group; parents, foster carer, social worker and child/young person. Participants should then go into groups so that each of the roles is represented. Where there are numbers that aren't divisible by four then add in roles e.g. manager, supervising social worker etc.

1. Participants should read the case study for Dillon or their preferred scenario.
2. Ask each group to consider the following questions according to their role:
 - As the parent/foster carer/social worker/child or young person, what do they feel?
 - What do they want to say at the meeting to the social worker/foster carer/parent/child or young person?
 - What difficulties do they face in this situation?
 - What do they need in order to be able to participate in the meeting?
3. Each group should then role play a meeting with the social worker as the chair and participants presenting their views and feelings to the meeting.
4. After the 'role-play', take feedback from the participants 'in role'.

Questions to consider during the feedback session

- Where was power located in the meeting?
- Was the voice of the child or young person heard?
- Was the voice of the parent heard?
- Were issues of identity and diversity addressed?
- Was there an acknowledgement of the parent's feelings, such as hostility, anger, sadness, distress, guilt?

Learning points to focus on and draw out

- Understanding the impact on the child of their parent's feelings.
- Giving permission for views to be expressed.
- The impact that a lack of information can have.
- Clarifying how the parent can be involved.
- The impact of a social worker's use of power.

At the end of the feedback, make sure you take participants out of role. You should then summarise the practice points for involving family members, before ending by asking all participants to identify one thing they have learnt from the session and one thing that they will do differently in the future.



ⁱ Research in Practice (2005) Fostering Now: Fostering Service Development Exercises