BUILDING BRIDGES OF HOPE AFTER LOSS:

A SELF-DIRECTED WORKBOOK

FOR FOSTER PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING BRIDGES OF HOPE AFTER LOSS:

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By

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Building Bridges of Hope After Loss is a self-directed workbook aimed to provide support for foster parents who are grieving the loss of children who joined their families but had to leave either to meet the requirements of the court's permanency plan or other reasons. The learning objectives focus on learning: (a) what permanency is, (b) the benefits of family reunification, (c) the dynamics of grief and loss, (d) the symptoms associated with grief and loss, (e) coping strategies, and (f) activities that help families say good-bye to children who leave them and become "loss managers."

This resource is named a workbook not curriculum to be more family-friendly. It uses a self-directed design so that foster parents can work with this resource on their own, with other members of their families and/or other social workers or other service providers. This workbook includes both activities and resources for future support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

When child protective services separates children from their parents, typically because of abuse or neglect, they are assessing that the trauma children have experienced will be ameliorated by joining foster families who will provide safety, well-being, and a path to permanency (Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-89). Although the intention is stability, too many of these children continue to experience disruptions by moving from one family to another. As of April to March 2015, 37.2% of children have lived with one family, 35.9% have lived with two families, 15% have lived with three families, 6.5% have lived with four families, and 5.4% have lived with five or more families (Webster et al., 2016). Children who have experienced multiple moves describe how they are often not informed of the impending changes and encounter multiple losses and grief (Unrau, Seita, & Putney, 2008). It is likely that even infants and toddlers who cannot articulate their feelings may still experience confusion and disruption of routine, even though they may not understand what happened (Zero to Six Collaborative Group, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2010). The children are not the only ones who experience loss. The birth parents, foster parents, and even any birth children in the foster family experience it also (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014).

Various factors can influence how the foster parents grieve such as the age of the children in relation to their length of stay with their families and the emotional fit between the children and each member of the foster families (Edelstein, Burge, & Waterman, 2001). Unresolved grief can result in various challenges for all foster family members. For example, the foster parents may be emotionally unavailable, hindering relationships with their birth children and other

family members (Edelstein et al., 2001). It can also impact their relationships with their agencies, leading to more retention challenges for agencies and public relations in their communities (Pasztor & McNitt, 2015). Agency staff must help foster parents address their grief and find ways to travel what is known as "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process." This means moving from denial to bargaining to anger and depression, but also to understanding, coping, and, in the best outcome, not to get "stuck" in any of those stages but to be a "loss manager" and become stronger from the experience (Pasztor, 2009).

Definition of the Terms

The terminology and definitions for this project include:

Adoption: The legal process where children will not be raised by their birth parents but, instead, become a permanent legal member of another family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

Child welfare agency: A governmental department with a legal mandate to provide child protection services; or a private, not-for-profit agency that has a contract with a public agency to provide child welfare services (Phagan-Hansel, 2012).

Family foster care: A mandated child welfare service for children and parents who must live apart while maintaining legal, and almost always, affectionate ties (Phagan-Hansel, 2012).

Foster family agency (FFA): An organization that recruits, certifies, trains, and supports foster parents. Also, it helps find families for children who need temporary or permanent care (California Department of Social Services, 2007).

Foster parent(s): An individual or couple who is licensed, certified, or approved to provide around-the-clock protection and nurturing for children in the custody of a public or private child welfare agency, lasting for a few days, weeks, months, or years (Phagan-Hansel,

2012).

Grief: The emotional response to the loss of a loved one (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001).

Out-of-home care: The overall term for child welfare services that are provided for children and parents who are not living together, including family foster care, emergency shelter care, kinship care, group homes, or residential treatment facilities (Pasztor & Petras, 2012).

Reunification: The process where a child in an out-of-home care returns back to their family of origin (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

Self-directed curriculum: The process where individuals are responsible for their own learning, they plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning at their own pace (Abdullah, 2001; Lee, Tsai, Chai, & Koh, 2014).

Separated: The strengths-based word for "removed," as in "the children were separated from their parents" instead of "removed" as if they were objects, such as garbage or snow (Pasztor, Fiorito, Clements, Petras, & Poteet, 2016).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to create a self-directed workbook for foster parents who are grieving the loss of children who had joined their families, but based on the decisions of the courts and/or the agencies the children had to leave. The reasons may include reunification with parents and/or relatives, adoption by another family, move to another foster family, the need for hospitalization, or a higher level of care. Sometimes, however, the foster families decide that children must leave because of behavioral issues, concerns about birth families, or unhappiness with the permanency plans. Also, sometimes it may be unintended circumstances such as: a death, divorce, or having to leave the area (Petras & Pasztor, 2016).

Goal and Objectives

This workbook's goal is to provide knowledge and skills for foster parents who may be grieving the loss of children who had joined their families but had to leave either to meet the requirements of the court's permanency plan or other reasons.

The workbook objectives are to:

a. Understand what permanency is and why it is essential for children.
b. Understand why fostering is not a permanency option.
c. Understand the role of foster parents in helping children achieve permanency.
d. Understand the feelings and behaviors typically associated with grief and loss.
e. Understand the "pathway through the grieving process," with the aim of becoming "loss managers."
f. Identify skills and activities that may help all foster family members, including parents and children manage the grieving process.
g. Recognize the benefits and rewards of children achieving permanency with family reunification as the first goal and then adoption.
h. Understand the valuable role that foster parents have in helping children achieve permanency as a way of becoming "loss managers."

Relevance to Social Work and Multiculturalism

This workbook evidences the following six principles of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2015): service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. The value of service can be demonstrated by providing this workbook as a resource for foster families who are grieving the loss of children from their families. The value of dignity and worth of the person can be

demonstrated by being mindful that individuals have different ways of grieving and coping. The value of importance of human relationships can be demonstrated because the workbook is designed for foster parents not only to work individually, but also with a team of service providers. The value of integrity can be demonstrated by treating foster parents fairly and in a trustworthy manner. The value of competence may be demonstrated by increasing information and support for foster families, emphasizing the benefits and rewards of reuniting children with their birth families or helping children achieve another permanency outcome. Finally, social justice would be demonstrated by using this workbook to help ensure that foster parents get the support they deserve when they became certified, as well as helping foster parents be advocates for themselves and the children in their care.

This project also has multicultural relevance for children and families because they come from all different backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and cultures. Grief and loss crosses all cultures. The culture and/or religion of diverse individuals have significant roles in the way they respond and cope with grief and loss. Each culture and religion have different views on what is appropriate with how they cope and grieve the loss of an individual and/or loved one. For example, people can engage in rituals, which can restore their sense of normalcy and uncertainty of loss (Hardy-Bougere, 2008). In the African American culture, individuals experiencing grief and loss tend to rely on their inner strengths and can appear to be unaffected by their loss until they encounter someone with their similar culture (Hardy-Bougere, 2008).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review is organized into the following sections: demographics of children in foster care; impact of grief and loss on foster parents; implications for foster parent retention and recruitment; curriculum or training programs that address grief and loss; and the benefits of self-instructional training resources.

Demographics of Children in Foster Care

Children who are separated from their parents and enter the U.S. foster care system represent diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages. Annually, data about these youth are collected from Title IV-E child welfare agencies to inform the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). According to the 2015-2016 AFCARS report, there were 427,910 children, of which 52% are males and 48% are females. Regarding ethnicity, 24% are Black or African American, 21% are Hispanic, and 43% are White. The remaining 12% reflect other ethnicities or are multiracial.

These children range between the ages of 0 to 20 years and the average age is 8 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Many of these children have service plan goals of either being reunified with their parents, living with relatives, being adopted, having long-term foster care or guardianship, or transitioning from foster care. More than half (55%) of these children have the goal of reunification, and 25% have the goal of adoption. While gender identity and sexual orientation are essential components of the growth and development of children and youth, demographic information about these variables is not readily available.

Impact of Grief and Loss on Foster Parents

Foster parents often experience grief and loss when children who join their families and to whom they become attached to are removed or separated. Various factors can influence the way foster parents grieve. These can include, for example, the age of the children when they joined the families, the length of stay of the children, and the emotional fit between the children and foster family (Edelstein et al., 2001).

First, the age of the children when they joined the family is a critical factor. When foster parents take care of children from infancy, they may naturally feel like they are the parents of the children, which help strengthen the bond. Thus, when these children leave, it can feel painful to the foster parents, as if they have lost one of their own children (Edelstein et al., 2001). Also, the longer the children have stayed with these families, the more it can impact grief and loss. Over 25 years ago, Falhberg (1991) documented that the longer these foster family child relationships lasts, the more severe the effects may be.

Further, the emotional fit of the children to the foster families can affect the intensity of grieving that the foster parents have to endure. The foster parents can develop close and strong relationships with the children and can feel a special connection with them because they are best suited for this family. Also, if the foster parents and children endure and master challenges during the time they are together, such as infants who were prenatally exposed to drugs, the bond that they have strengthens and can make the loss of the children more difficult and intense (Edelstein et al., 2001).

The above dynamics can be complicated because of what is known as disenfranchised grief, the erroneous assumption that some relationships are not strong enough to elicit sorrow because they are not supposed to be so strong. These can include, for example, according to the

literature, pets, homosexual relationships, and even foster parent-child relationships (Doka, 1989). Regarding foster parents, disenfranchised grief is especially critical because foster parents are taught that their relationships with the children who join their families are supposed to be temporary.

Although foster parents experience disenfranchised grief, the common symptoms of grief and loss are often presented. Some of the symptoms they can face are crying, feeling depressed and/or angry, and have sleep disturbances (Edelstein et al., 2001). If the grief of the foster parents is left unattended and not addressed, it can interfere with an array of family relationships. For example, foster parents may not be emotionally available to take care of the other children in their families, and they may have stressful relationships with their agencies. Almost 20 years ago, it was noted that foster parents are often expected to manage many challenging feelings. This is because they are expected to have, as Andersson (2001) described, an "emotional surplus," which would equip them to deal with their feelings of loss, grief, and other complex dynamics that are inherent in working in child welfare services.

Implications for Retention and Recruitment

Recruitment and retention of foster parents are essential factors to any child welfare agency. Recruitment is the development of skills and practices to recruit individuals and retention is the support that is given to maintain the recruited individuals. However, over 20 years ago, it was recommended that retention be addressed before recruitment. The rationale was that if families could be retained, it would not be a challenge to recruit them (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995). Child welfare agencies often find it difficult to find and keep individuals who are able, have the resources, and are willing to become certified foster parents (Casey Family Programs,

2014; Petras & Pasztor, 2016). Also, it was recognized that recruitment is a task and retention is an outcome. Therefore, Pasztor and Wynne recommended integrating these two processes.

Implications for the recruitment and retention of foster parents have been widely assessed and addressed and guidelines have been established to better aid in these factors. Many child welfare agencies often use media campaigns and pamphlets/posters to recruit foster parents and do not take into consideration using the foster parents and the community as a recruitment tool (Casey Family Programs, 2014). Research has shown that foster parents are believed to be the most effective recruiters than child welfare workers and campaigns (Marcenko, Brennan, & Lyons, 2009). Involving the community and current foster parents in the development, implementation and strategic recruitment plan is the most beneficial, as evidenced by the *PRIDE Model of Practice*.

With the recruitment of individuals, a plan must be made to retain and support them. Within the *PRIDE Model of Practice,* there are 25 components of support that can be utilized for the retention of foster parents. Some of these components are: clarifying the foster parents' role both to the agency and community, provide competency-based pre-service and in-service trainings, collaborate and make foster parents a member of the professional team, and monitoring and supervising foster parents on a continual basis (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; Petras & Pasztor, 2016).

Clarifying the foster parents' role both to the agency and community refers to letting the foster parents understand the specific responsibilities that they have with the children as well as understanding the competencies and other qualifications they need to fulfill their role as foster parents. Competency-based pre-service and in-service trainings refer to the agencies providing ongoing trainings for foster parents. Experienced professionals who have the training ability and

content credibility should teach these trainings. It is also recommended that an experienced foster parent be a co-trainer during these trainings.

During the pre-service trainings, prospective foster parents should be taught specific agency values and skills, including: (1) the goals, purpose, philosophy, and organizational structure of the agency, (2) the family assessment (home study) process, and (3) the rights, responsibilities, and policies that can affect them as foster parents. By continually incorporating in-service trainings, foster parents are taught the needed skills and knowledge that cannot be fully taught during the pre-service training. Within the *Foster PRIDE/ Adopt PRIDE* program, in-service trainings are organized into three stages: core, advanced, and specialized. In the core trainings, foster parents are taught to build on the knowledge and competencies that they received during the pre-service training and identify their interest for higher levels of advanced competencies. In advanced trainings, foster parents are taught the same goals as the core training; however, it is taught at a higher skill level. Finally, in specialized training, foster parents are taught the needed skills that are required to take care of medically fragile children (Petras & Pasztor, 2016).

Public agencies are mandated to achieve safety, well-being, and permanency and they "outsource" these responsibilities to foster parents on a 24 hour basis. The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment (2016) states that agencies are responsible for monitoring and supervising foster families on a continuous basis. By providing foster parents with ongoing supervision and monitoring, agencies are providing support to the family and are aware of what is going on with the children. Foster parents are able to consult with the child welfare workers and discuss what services the children may need and get support to help them meet the identified needs of the children.

Curriculum/Programs Addressing Loss

Many of the curriculums and programs that are utilized addressing loss focuses around the Kubler-Ross stages of death and dying. In this theory, individuals go through five stages: (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression, and (5) acceptance (Patricelli, 2006). In the denial stage, the individual is unwilling to accept that the loved one is gone and believes that they are in a bad dream ready to wake up. Once the individual accepts the loss, they encounter the second stage, anger. In this stage, the individuals become angry and begin to blame themselves thinking that it is unfair. After going through this stage, individuals go through the bargaining stage, where they start to bargain saying that they will do something as long as their loved one does not die. When individuals realize that their loved one will not come back, they enter the fourth stage of depression. In this stage, individuals may start to cry and withdraw from relationships and activities. Finally, once individuals process all of their initial grief and accept that the loss happened, they enter the final stage of acceptance, where they understand that the person is gone and won't come back (Patricelli, 2006).

Another curriculum and program that is commonly used in addressing loss is Worden's stages of mourning, which is similar to Kubler-Ross's stages of death and dying. He believed that individuals who are grieving must accomplish four tasks before the mourning is completed (Worden, 2002). These four tasks are: (1) to accept the reality of the loss, (2) working through the pain of grief, (3) to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and (4) to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life (Blevins, 2008; Worden, 2002). If these individuals have not completed the four tasks, they can develop mental, emotional, and physical problems (Worden, 2002).

The first task that individuals must complete is to accept the reality of the loss. In this task, individuals must begin to come to terms about what really happened and accept that the loved one is not coming back. Individuals can take weeks, even months, to accept that the individual is gone. Each person processes this task differently, depending on their belief systems, cultural traditions, and the amount of support that they receive (Blevins, 2008). After this task is completed, the next task is for the individuals to work through the pain of grief. In this task, individuals must endure the various forms that grief can portray itself. Sometimes individuals can find this task to be difficult because of society (Blevins, 2008; Worden, 2002).

Thirdly, individuals must adjust to a world without the loved one and this task has three different areas of adjustment that needs to be addressed: (1) external adjustments, (2) internal adjustments, and (3) spiritual adjustments (Blevins, 2008; Worden, 2002). In external adjustments, individuals who are grieving must learn how to create new tasks and responsibilities to help them mourn. Also, they need to understand how the death of the loved one affects how they function every day. In internal adjustments, individuals must question themselves on how the death of the individual affects their sense of self and must come to terms about "developing a new sense of self without the identity of the person they lost" (Blevins, 2008, p. 97). In spiritual adjustments, individuals have to come to terms about how the death affects their belief system and values (Blevins, 2008). Worden (2002) states that in this adjustment period, individuals who are grieving search for meaning about the loss in order to create meaning and regain control of their lives.

Finally, after these three tasks have been accomplished, individuals must emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. In this task, individuals find a healthy way to feel

connected with the loss loved one. If individuals remain connected to the deceased, in the same way before the loved one passed away, they have not completed this task (Blevins, 2008).

One of the most common programs addressing loss is through the use of support groups. Support groups allow grieving individuals to process their emotions and talk with others with similar experiences. For example, one of the many support groups is Grief Share (2016), an online website where individuals can locate a group in proximity to them that, over 13 weeks, addresses topics focusing on grief and rebuilding lives. There are video seminars addressing specific topics, support group discussions, and a personal study and reflection workbook to process emotions and what was learned from each week. Topics include: the challenges of grief, the journey of grief, grief and your relationships, and guilt and anger.

Although all people experience grief, there are different programs and curriculums that address grief for foster parents. Before foster parents become certified, licensed, or approved (depending upon the jurisdiction), some public and private agencies offer *Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE*, which is the pre-service assessment and selection component of the PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) Model of Practice to Develop and Support Resource Parents as Team Members in Child Protection and Trauma Informed Care of Children (Petras & Pasztor, 2016). This includes a tool known as "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process," which helps them become loss managers (Pasztor, 2009).

In this process, foster parents experience similar stages found in Kubler-Ross' stages of death and dying. Foster parents also experience denial, bargaining, anger, and acceptance as they grieve over a loss. However, in the Pathway Through the Grieving Process, foster parents experience two more stages of coping and finally becoming a loss manager (Pasztor, 2009).

Coping involves individuals to work with a team to help them overcome and manage the loss. Becoming a loss manager refers to individuals becoming a survivor of the loss.

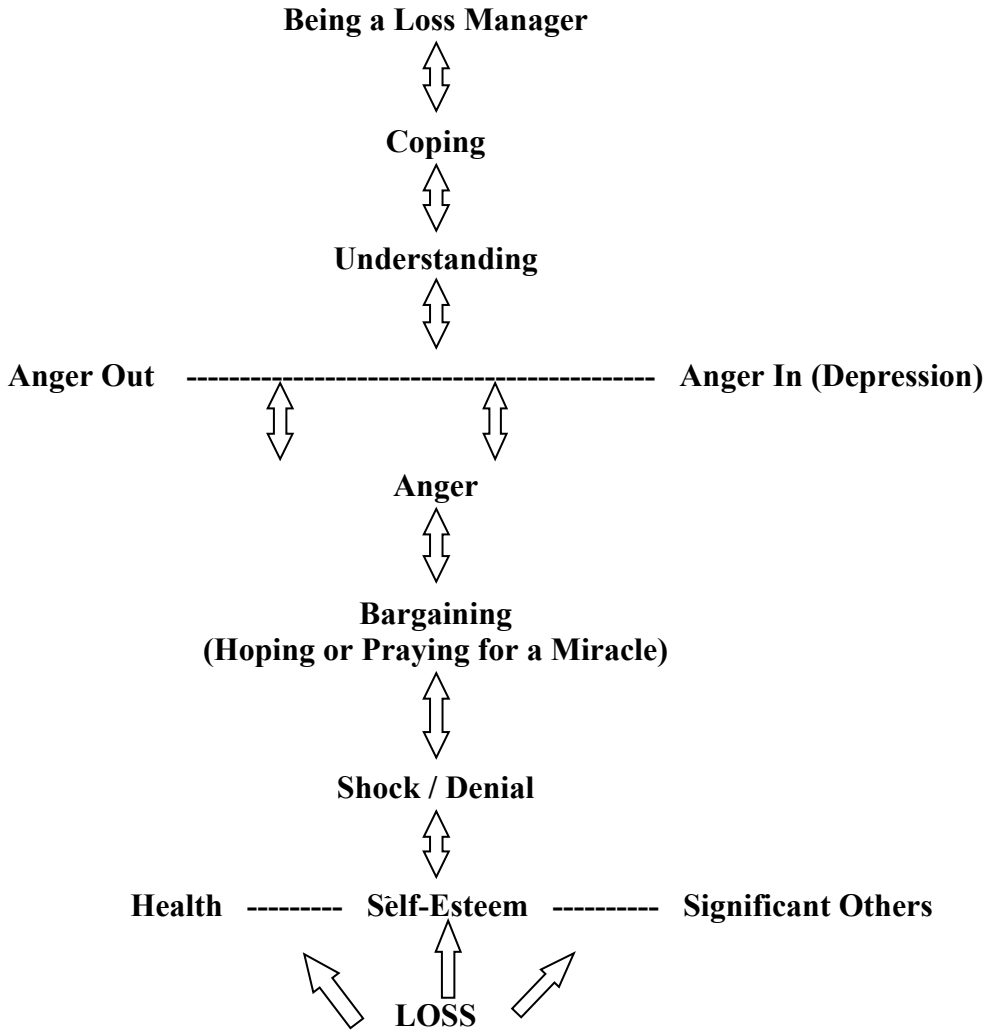

FIGURE 1. The Pathway Through the Grieving Process.

Figure 1 provides an overview of how the Pathway Through the Grieving Process looks like for foster parents experiencing loss. First, foster parents go through the first stage of loss, where they can experience the loss of health, self-esteem, and significant others. The loss of health can refer to there not being enough food and/or no medical/dental care. The loss of self-

esteem can refer to individuals feeling depressed, miserable, and unhappy with the current situation they are in. Finally, the loss of significant others can refer to the loss of individuals.

After foster parents go through the first stage, they then move on to the second stage: shock/denial. This stage is similar to Kubler-Ross's stages of death and dying because the individual is in shock and in denial that the individual is gone and will begin to start bargaining and hope and pray for a miracle. As foster parents travel through the pathway, the third stage they will encounter is anger. The anger can either be expressed outwardly or inwardly. When the anger is expressed inwardly, the foster parents can become depressed. After the anger stage, the foster parents move to the stage of understanding, where they understand that the individual is gone and will begin the next stage of coping. After being able to cope with the loss, foster parents then become loss managers, where they become survivors of the loss.

Although there are seven stages in the Pathway Through the Grieving Process, it is important to know that foster parents can fluctuate between these stages. The arrows in Figure 1 go up and down to show that this pathway is not a set pathway, but can change. They can go back and forth from "understanding to anger to bargaining to denial, and then start over" (Pasztor, 2009, p.3).

Benefits of Self-Directed Curriculums/Programs

Self-directed learning (SDL) programs have been widely used across the United States and have many advantages. SDL has been used at schools and various companies/businesses and can be online and/or non-online programs. SDL is the process where individuals are responsible for their own learning, they plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning at their own pace (Abdullah, 2001; Lee et al., 2014).

Some of the benefits of SDL are that individuals "diagnose their learning needs,

formulate goals, identify human and material resources, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies and evaluate learning outcomes" (Abraham, Hassan, Ahlam Damanhuri, & Salehuddin, 2016, p.15). SDL provides the learner the opportunity to be both the teacher and the student. According to Abraham and his colleagues (2016), there are four attributes that describe self-directed learning: personal autonomy, self-management, independent pursuit of learning, and the individual takes control of their learning. Personal autonomy refers to the freedom that the individual has in how they want to evaluate their limitations or needs when it comes to learning. Self-management refers to the learners' ability to work at their own pace and manage their learning. Independent pursuit of learning refers to the individual's decision of how they want to learn. For example, they may use other resources like the Internet and other curriculums/program to help them with their learning. Finally, individuals take control of their learning refers to how the individual organizes the information and what they do with it.

Studies have been implemented across the United States to understand the benefits of self-directed curriculums/programs. For example, Delaney, Nelson, Pacifici, White, and Smalley (2012), studied the effectiveness and satisfaction of a web-based pre-service training about child abuse and neglect for prospective foster parents. Ninety-two prospective foster parents from Utah and Wisconsin were randomly assigned to the treatment group or comparison group and completed a written questionnaire before and after the class. Forty-one foster parents were randomly assigned into the treatment group and would watch the pre-service training online compared to the remaining 51 who were in the comparison group, who would listen to the pre-service training in person.

The results of the study indicated that the web-based training program was more effective compared to the live instruction. The participants of the online instruction reported having high

satisfaction of the program compared to the live instruction. The participants in the live instruction were not satisfied with the training because they felt “there was not enough time for trainers to cover all of the intended materials, or that they might have missed hearing some of the information presented” (Delaney et al., 2012). Delaney and his colleagues stated that by providing web-based trainings, it allows there to be various advantages, such as: cutting agency and trainee costs and providing greater flexibility.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, this chapter identifies the target population for *Building Bridges of Hope After Loss: A Self-Directed Workbook for Foster Parents*. Next, this chapter reviews the goal and objectives. Lastly, this chapter describes the design and format.

Target Population

The target population for this self-directed workbook is foster parents who are grieving the loss of children who were separated from their families. Child welfare agency staff who work directly with foster parents are a secondary target group, using this resource to better understand and support foster families, and help "minimize trauma and maximize teamwork" (Petras & Pasztor, 2016, Session 1, p. 10). Another target group could be mental health professionals who may find this curriculum to be of value when working with foster families. Foster parent associations may find the content in this workbook to be useful in planning special trainings on the topic of loss.

Goal and Objectives

This workbook's goal is to provide knowledge and skills for foster parents who may be grieving the loss of children who had joined their families but had to leave either to meet the requirements of the court's permanency plan or other reasons.

The workbook objectives are to:

a. Understand what permanency is and why it is essential for children.

b. Understand why fostering is not a permanency option.

c. Understand the role of foster parents in helping children achieve permanency.

d. Understand the feelings and behaviors typically associated with grief and loss.

e. Understand the "pathway through the grieving process," with the aim of becoming "loss managers."

f. Identify skills and activities that may help all foster family members, including parents and children manage the grieving process.

g. Recognize the benefits and rewards of children achieving permanency with family reunification as the first goal and then adoption.

h. Understand the valuable role that foster parents have in helping children achieve permanency as a way of becoming "loss managers."

Design and Format

Building Bridges of Hope After Loss: A Self-Directed Workbook For Foster Parents is designed primarily as a guide for foster parents to complete on their own, with family members, or with others as appropriate. This workbook is formatted as a self-directed resource for several reasons. It will help with accommodating the foster parents' schedules, allow them to learn at their own pace and become a self-directed learner, and provide a convenient and comprehensive guide. The workbook is organized as follows:

a. Title page

b. Acknowledgement page

c. Table of Contents

d. Introduction to the Workbook: goal, objectives, target group, rationale

e. How to Use the Workbook

f. Learning sections, which include critical thinking sections, fact sheets and quick references, and activities

g. Resources

h. Feedback

i. Appendix, which includes references and a bio-sketch of the author.

CHAPTER 4

THE WORKBOOK

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses how to use the workbook. The second section provides information about the materials that are needed. The third section suggests how participants can access the workbook. The final section offers strategies for evaluation.

How to Use the Workbook

With the structure of the workbook being self-instructional, participants are expected to facilitate their own learning and become self-directed learners. However, the participants can also partner with other family members, social workers, and/or other service providers. By working with a partner for this workbook, it would aid in providing additional support to the foster parents.

Materials Needed

This workbook is easy to follow and requires the participants to only have a pen or pencil for them to fill in their answers for questions and make notes. The workbook will be presented in a three-ring binder in order for participants to add supplemental documents and resources that they believe will be helpful with their learning. The computer will be an additional material that is not required, however, it will be necessary to access supplemental resources.

Inviting Participants

With the primary aim of this workbook being for foster parents who are grieving the loss of foster children who were separated from their care, various participants can be identified through foster family agencies, child welfare agencies, mental health practitioners, or foster

parents. Copies of the workbook can be provided as a resource for child welfare agencies, mental health offices, and can be available to families who fit the criteria. For example, here are some sensitive suggestions for introducing the workbook to foster parents.

Vignette 1:

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson fostered a newborn infant for six months and thought that adoption was likely because there were no visits or family time set up by the agency. Then relatives came forward and wanted the baby. The court ordered the infant to go with the grandparents immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were devastated about this change in plans. You, as the agency child welfare worker meet with the family and see their grief. You talk with them and understand that the workbook would be helpful, as support and resources.

With Vignette 1, it is essential to address the agency's concern for the family during this difficult time. However, due to the family's grieving and with this being a sensitive topic to discuss, you do not want to push or force them into using a workbook that they are not ready to use. A conversation about offering this workbook to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson can be as follows:

> **Worker:** Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, I understand and see that you both are having a naturally difficult time processing what has recently happened to your family. I'm so sorry that you are so sad. On behalf of the agency, we hope that soon you will appreciate the excellent care you provided for this baby to help the baby move on. We are always available to talk with you, and I just want to let you know that I have resources available for you to access to help you cope during this difficult time. One of the resources that I have available is a workbook entitled *Building Bridges of Hope After Loss*. I know that this workbook will be a great resource for you both because it is specifically meant for families who are experiencing exactly what you both are going through and offers

strategies to cope and understand the benefits of the children joining their birth families. I will leave it with you and when you are ready, take a look or let me know if we can look at it together.

Vignette 2:

Mr. and Mrs. Diaz come into your agency requesting support and resources to help them cope because they recently found out that the 4-year-old child that they were planning to adopt is leaving their family in one week. How do introduce this workbook to them?

Unlike Vignette 1, with the child already gone, Vignette 2 addresses offering this workbook to a family who is starting the transition process of the child leaving. A conversation offering this workbook can look as follows:

Worker: Mr. and Mrs. Diaz, I understand that you came in to see if we have resources and support available to help you. Is that correct?

Mrs. Diaz: Yes. My husband and I feel that we need resources to help us transition into slowly letting go of our 4 year old.

Worker: Okay. There is one resource that I know that will help you both with this transition process called *Building Bridges of Hope After Loss.* This workbook talks about various topics such as: the benefits of a foster child returning back home and it provides coping strategies to address the loss. Would this workbook be something that interests you and would like to have?

Evaluation

This workbook will be evaluated using a "Level One" training evaluation. According to Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation, a level one is a customer satisfaction tool, which focuses on the reactions that participants have to the training (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

The evaluation is reframed as “Feedback” to be more user friendly. Participants are asked a series of questions for them to rank from 1 to 4, followed by open-ended questions. A Level Two evaluation, learning, was not considered appropriate because, due to the sensitivity of the topic, requiring a pre- and post-test did not seem suitable and sensitive. A Level Three evaluation, behavior, was not considered appropriate because it would be difficult for agencies to follow up with families in subsequent months to evaluate where they are on “The Pathway through the Grieving Process.” Finally, a Level Four evaluation, results, would be even more complicated because it would be challenging to identify the variables that would influence the ability of families to be “loss managers.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Building Bridges of Hope After Loss: A Self-Directed Workbook for Foster Parents was developed as a resource for foster parents to gain a deeper understanding about how to cope with the loss of children who have been separated from them. This chapter is organized into the following sections: review of the purpose and objectives of the workbook; identify the strengths and limitations; understand the implications for social work policy, practice, and advocacy; identify several recommendations for future research and development; and highlight the lessons learned from the proposal and workbook development experience.

Review of Workbook Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to create a self-directed workbook for foster parents who are grieving the loss of children who had joined their families, but based on the decisions of the courts and/or the agencies the children had to leave. This workbook provides resources and information to help support foster families during the grieving process after children are preparing to leave the family and/or have already left. In addition, this workbook can be beneficial for child welfare workers and mental health professionals who support foster parents. After completing the workbook, foster parents should be able to understand that grieving is normal, understand what permanency is, and become loss managers to help support other foster families going through the similar situation they have experienced.

Workbook Strengths and Limitations

Strengths and limitations can be found within this workbook. A major strength with this workbook is that it is formatted as a self-directed curriculum, which allows the participants to become self-directed learners. The participants are able to work on this workbook at their own

pace and according to their own schedules. In addition, it can promote collaboration, teamwork, and provide support with child welfare workers and mental health professionals as it can also be shared.

Despite there being strengths, limitations can also be observed. For example, the workbook is primarily focused on helping and supporting foster parents who are grieving. However, due to their emotional state, they may not want to focus on the issues raised in the workbook because the grieving process may be too difficult and take their energy. Also, foster parents may be busy with their schedules and have other responsibilities. Another limitation may be access; foster parents need to know that this resource is available.

Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice, and Advocacy

Prior to children joining foster families, all foster parents are required to participate in some kind of preservice training and family assessment program. In most of these, such as *Foster PRIDE/ Adopt PRIDE,* they learn that fostering is not permanency for children (Petras & Pasztor, 2016). It is emphasized that children who join their families must have reunification with parents or with relatives as the primarily goal. Only if those options are not possible, can foster parents be considered as adoptive parents.

They may learn, for example, about "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process" to prepare them to be "loss managers" (Petras & Pasztor, 2016). However, despite these trainings, foster parents sometimes forget what they learned because there may be no additional trainings offered to discuss these topics. In addition, there may not be any skilled agency staff to be supportive. It is essential for foster parents and child welfare workers to discuss what they learned during pre-service training as a refresher for them.

Additionally, every foster family agency must provide trainings and support groups that discuss and support foster families who have children leaving them, especially when they are attached to those children. Providing these opportunities could help foster families process their grieving and cope. Trainings should also be offered to the agency workers supporting the families. This is because, due to the families' trauma, the staff can experience posttraumatic stress or secondary trauma.

There are six major principles of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2015): social justice, service, importance of human relationships, integrity, dignity and worth of a person, and competence. Two principles stand out regarding policy, practice, and advocacy. First, social justice stands out because many of these foster families do not receive services to help them address their grief of the children leaving their families. It is imperative for foster family agencies and other mental health practitioners to provide resources, services, and support groups to help foster parents/families process and cope with their grief. Competence is equally as important because mental health professionals, social workers, and child welfare workers will not be able to effectively help the foster parents cope and grieve the loss if they are not knowledgeable about the families' culture, traditions, and norms. It is vital that all clinicians, social workers, and child welfare staff be trained and knowledgeable about the grieving process for different cultures.

Recommendations for Future Research and Development

While doing research for this workbook, it was challenging to identify extensive information about how foster parents grieve the loss of the children in their care. It would be beneficial for future research to be conducted regarding ways to help support foster parents who are grieving. In addition, future research should be done about the effectiveness of providing

support groups for grieving foster parents, followed by an outcome after they were given the support. Finally, there should be future research about helping foster parents understand "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process."

Lessons Learned

Upon developing the proposal for this workbook, this writer was able to gain a deeper understanding of how to prepare a proposal. This writer learned that the proposal is a condensed version to the actual thesis. This facilitated the thesis-writing process because the proposal provided the foundation for thinking through what would be included in more detail in the completed thesis project.

While developing the workbook, this writer was able to gain a deeper understanding of how to support foster families grieving the loss of foster children who were once a part of their families. Although there is a substantial amount of information about the ways foster children experience grief and loss, this writer learned that there was little research done to address the loss of children for foster parents. This writer also learned that developing and creating a curriculum is a long process, but manageable when organized into sections. By reviewing other curricula, this writer was able to learn how to create and develop this innovative curriculum.

One helpful process was to create a binder with different sections which included the pages of content and what would be a good fit where. When certain content did not work in one section, this writer was able to place it into a different section. This practice was beneficial because it was able to help the writer understand what sections would help make the curriculum flow from one section to the next.

Additionally, this writer learned that reviewing the literature was tedious and time consuming because a great amount of time had to be dedicated to this process. This writer had to

be organized which included creating folders that addressed certain topics and placing articles that fit into those topics. By doing this, this writer was able to more easily access information primarily meant for a specific topic, rather than searching through various articles. Also, this writer learned that it is essential to ask for help when information could not be found. Furthermore, this writer learned that despite the tedious, time-consuming, and difficult process of creating a curriculum, there are many benefits. First, it is an excellent skill to have for future employment. Most important, it is beneficial for the families and agency staff who are responsible for supporting them. And by sharing this workbook with the National Foster Parent Association and local affiliates, there is the possibility for a quite personal experience to have a macro impact.

APPENDIX

BUILDING BRIDGES OF HOPE AFTER LOSS:

A SELF-DIRECTED WORKBOOK FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Building Bridges of Hope After Loss:
A Self-Directed Workbook for Foster Parents

Developed by

Hazelle B. Tanag, MSW (May 2017)

School of Social Work

California State University, Long Beach

Building Bridges of Hope After Loss:

A Self-Directed Workbook for Foster Parents

Developed by
Hazelle B. Tanag, MSW (May 2017)
School of Social Work
California State University, Long Beach

Acknowledgements and Welcome

This workbook is dedicated to the many foster families who open their hearts to take care of the children who join them. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to provide safety and well-being to these vulnerable children and help them connect to relationships that are lasting.

Thank you for taking the time to open this workbook. I hope that this workbook will be helpful for you and everyone who has feelings of sadness, grief, and loss when children you have cared for and love leave your family. I hope that you have some satisfaction in knowing that you made a difference.

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Introduction to Workbook

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this workbook is to provide the knowledge and skills for foster parents who may be grieving the loss of children who had joined their families but had to leave either to meet the requirements of the court's permanency plan or other reasons.

The workbook's objectives are to:

- Understand what permanency is and why it is essential for children
- Understand why fostering is not a permanency option
- Understand the role of foster parents in helping children achieve permanency
- Understand the feelings and behaviors typically associated with grief and loss
- Understand "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process," with the aim of becoming "loss managers"
- Identify skills and activities that may help all foster family members, including parents and children manage the grieving process
- Recognize the benefits and rewards of children achieving permanency with family reunification as the first goal and then adoption
- Understand the valuable role that foster parents have in helping children achieve permanency as a way of becoming "loss managers"

Please note that this workbook on loss does not take the place of talking with professionals who are trained in addressing feelings of sadness and perhaps anger. Please be certain to contact your agency's child welfare worker for support.

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Getting Started

How to Use the Workbook

This workbook is organized into five different sections (wellness toolbox, foster care & permanency, understanding grief & loss, saying goodbye, and coping), with each section building upon each other. This workbook allows you to be both your own teacher and learner. As a self-directed workbook, you are expected to be able to facilitate your own learning and work at your own pace.

Materials Needed

This workbook is designed to be an easy to follow workbook that requires you to only have a pen or pencil to fill in your answers for questions and make notes. The workbook is presented in a three-ring binder in order for you to add supplemental documents and resources that you believe will be helpful with your learning. The computer will be an additional material that is not required, however, it will be necessary to access supplemental resources.

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Section 1:
Wellness Toolbox

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Activity: Toolbox Kit

List any activities that you like to do and would like to try to help you calm down. Then keep adding new ones and/or crossing out ones you decide are not right for you. This will be useful as you complete the workbook. The next page will include some examples.

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Example Toolbox Kit

Journaling

Going for a walk

Exercising

Playing an instrument

Singing

Dancing

Reading a book

Listening to music

Spend time with friends

Shopping

Watch a movie

Pray

Sleep

Watch television

Do arts and crafts

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Activity: Social Support System

Identify a list of people who you can turn to when you need support. This can include family members, friends, therapists, and social workers. This will be useful as you complete the workbook.

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

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Section 2:
Foster Care & Permanency

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What is Foster Care and Permanency?

Foster Care

- Also known as out-of-home care
- Temporary service for children who cannot live with their parents
- Can refer to settings such as:
  - Group homes
  - Residential care facilities
  - Emergency shelters

Permanency

- Giving and supporting lifelong family connections
- Provides a safe and stable environment where children can grow up and develop a life-long relationship with a nurturing caregiver
- Permanency can be achieved through:
  - Children reunifying with their families
  - Adoption
  - Guardianship
- Benefits
  - Children develop attachments to caregivers
  - A life-long relationship is formed
  - Children develop a continuous connection to family, traditions, culture, and ethnic heritage, religion, and language

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; IFAPA, 2013)

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Family Reunification Facts

- Refers to the process of joining children in temporary out-of-home placement back to their families of origin
- It is the most common goal for children in out-of-home placement
- During the fiscal year of 2015-2016, 55% of children returned to a parent or caregiver

Involvement of Foster Parents

- Foster parents can facilitate family reunification through:
  - Supporting the children's visits with parents
  - Letting the children talk to their family, as per court order
- Develop a positive relationship with the birth parents

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016)

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Activity: Family Permanency

From the list, check off how you have helped promote and support family reunification with the birth family.

___ Bringing children to visits or family time with parents, siblings, relatives

___ Supporting the children to go to visits or family time

___ Helping the children make phone calls to family members

___ Develop a positive relationship with the birth parents

___ Attend team meetings to discuss the children's service plan.

If there is anything else that is missing, please write it below.

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The next section may be difficult for some parents. You are welcome to take a break, perhaps do some of the activities that you identified on your toolbox kit on page 4. Whenever you are ready, please begin the next section.

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Section 3:
Understanding Grief and Loss

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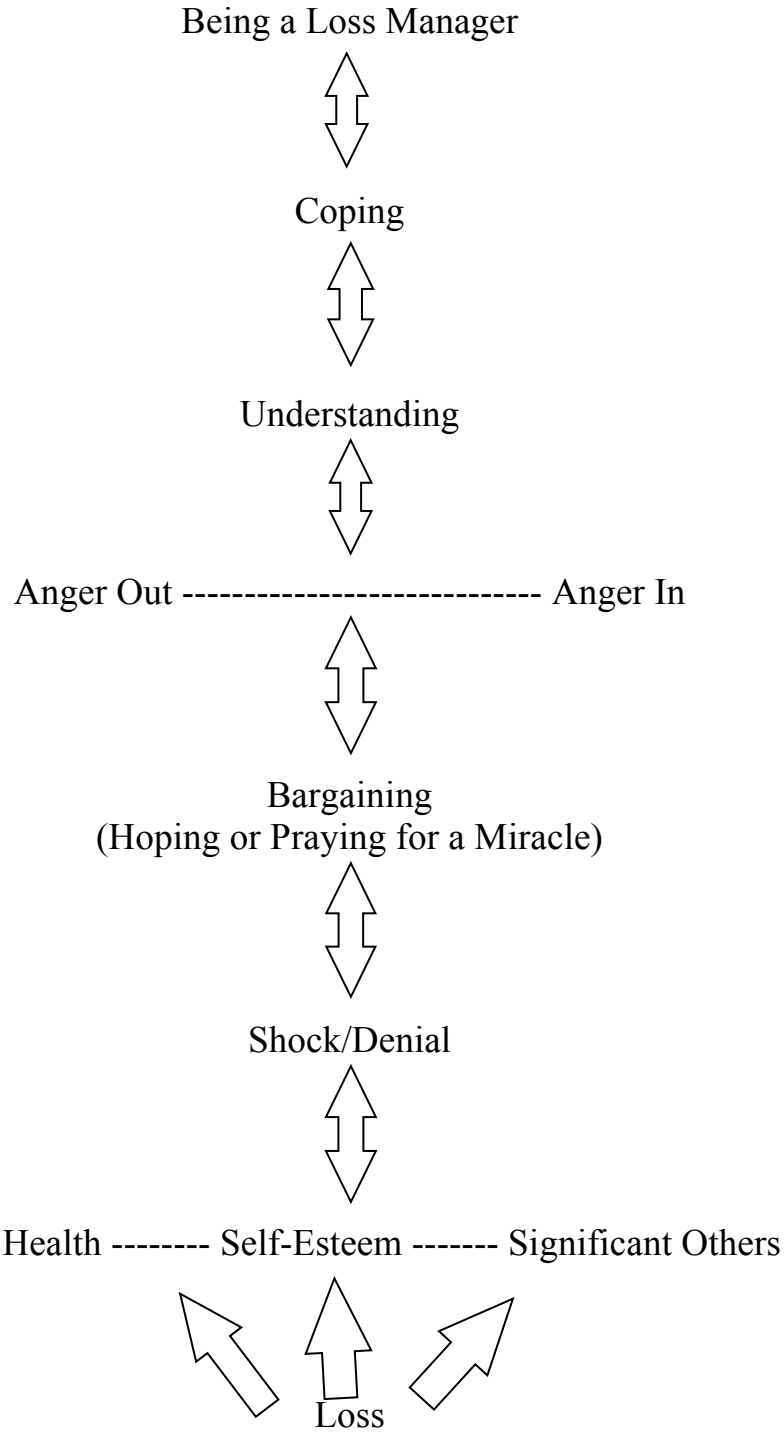
The Pathway Through the Grieving Process



(Pasztor, 2009)

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THE PATHWAY THROUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS: BEING A LOSS MANAGER

Helping Children with Loss and Grief *

The "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process" is one of the most important "best practices tools" used in the *PRIDE Model of Practice* to develop and support resource (foster and adoptive) parents as team members in child protection. (**PRIDE** is an acronym for **P**arent **R**esources for **I**nformation, **D**evelopment, and **E**ducation, published by the Child Welfare League of America – www.cwla.org). "Resource Parent" recognizes that foster and adoptive families make a 24-hour a day contribution to the well-being of the children who join their families. A model of practice means that resource parents and staff work together to achieve the same vision, mission, goal, objectives, and outcomes. This is achieved by using "best practices tools" such as this "Pathway Through the Grieving Process." Here is how it works:

Imagine that your family has completed the licensing, certification, or approval process and you are ready to have a child join your family. Your agency contacts you about a little girl, Amanda (not her real name), not quite five years old, and living on the streets with her teen-age mother, who was hospitalized for mental distress. With no known relatives to take Amanda, your family's "Map" and "Clock" (other *PRIDE* tools) determine that Amanda could be protected and nurtured (the first *PRIDE* competency category) by your family. You also have discussed what was known about Amanda from the "Jigsaw Puzzle" perspective (another *PRIDE* tool). Based on these initial assessments, it is decided by your family and the agency that your family and Amanda are a good match.

The next step is to think about how to gain Amanda's trust and help her attach to your family (another *PRIDE* tool), because attachment is so important. Here is where the "Pathway through the Grieving Process" comes in and how it works. You read it from the bottom up.

Look for the word **LOSS** at the bottom of the diagram and then, above it, **HEALTH, SELF-ESTEEM, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS**. This shows that there are three kinds of losses that children and adults can experience. Amanda has experienced all three kinds of losses. On the left, she had **health** losses because of neglect (not enough food, no medical or dental care, and physical pain from what might be burns from playing with cigarettes and matches.) On the right, she had **significant others** losses because she was separated from her mother to whom she is attached, even though her mother was not able to protect her and keep her safe. The middle word, **self-esteem**, is another typical loss: Amanda feels bad about herself because she thinks she did something wrong when she was separated from her mother. At her little girl age of just four years, she cannot understand all the strangers who have come into her life.

When Amanda comes to your family, she may be quiet and withdrawn. This can be the **SHOCK/DENIAL** stage; children can be confused by what is happening and all the changes. Next they may move to **BARGAINING,** or **HOPING OR PRAYING FOR A MIRACLE**. She may believe that if she is on her best behavior her mother will come for her. It is not that she

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does not like your family, but she does not know you. Even though your family may try hard to comfort and reassure Amanda that she is safe with you and you want to take care of her, she may not believe you. When her mother does not come for her, she may begin to express her anger. She may begin to "test" your family and see if you will keep her even when she misbehaves.

When Amanda travels the "pathway" to the **ANGER** stage, this can go to the outward expression of feelings or the inward expression. Outward might be that Amanda has temper tantrums, refuses to follow directions, perhaps she stops getting along with other children. Or Amanda may withdraw, turning her angry feelings on herself; she may be depressed, cry, whine, act fearful, and have trouble sleeping and eating. Fortunately, your family is learning that your foster parenting task is to help her, first, feel protected and nurtured. You must talk gently with her and be consistent. You will let her know that it is okay to feel mad, bad, and sad because she misses her mother and it is okay to feel angry, too. Amanda may need play therapy to **UNDERSTAND** at her young age that grown-ups are trying to help her mother and her. Meanwhile, she is safe and welcomed with your family.

With support from your agency's social worker, your family can show Amanda some "okay ways" to express sad, bad, mad feelings. The next step on the "Pathway" is to help Amanda **COPE** with the losses in her young life. This is different for each child and requires teamwork between all the members of Amanda's child welfare team: the Resource Family and the social worker, along with others, perhaps a play therapist. They will show her some okay ways to express those feelings. Eventually, hopefully, Amanda may become what is known as a **LOSS MANAGER**. A survivor from abuse and neglect, even as a little girl.

Here are several additional important points to think about regarding the "Pathway."
(1) See how the arrows go up and down. This is because none of us travel the "Pathway" just once. We can go back and forth from **UNDERSTANDING** to **ANGER** to **BARGAINING** to **DENIAL**, and then start over again. This can be caused by another loss of health, significant others, or self-esteem especially – when people hurt our feeling and let us down. Also, we do not travel the "pathway" in a particular order. we can experience the reactions to loss in any order.

(2) Resource Parents and agency staff must talk together about LOSS. Like most pathways, this is best traveled together, as a team.

(3) The *PRIDE Model of Practice* has an expression known as "parallel process." This means that what children experience, we as adults experience, too. Your Family Development Specialist will talk with you about your own experiences with **LOSS** and how you may have traveled the ***Pathway Through the Grieving Process*** and perhaps become a loss manager yourself.

(Pasztor, 2009)

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Activity: Identifying Feelings

Identify your feelings associated with the list of things that were lost or misplaced on the left side and write down how you were feeling on the right. A list of feelings will be available for you on the next page.

Remote control _____

Cell phone _____

Keys _____

Glasses/Sunglasses _____

Pen/pencil _____

Pet _____

Electronic device _____

Losing weight _____

Clothes _____

Chap stick/Lipstick/Lip balm _____

Money _____

Jewelry _____

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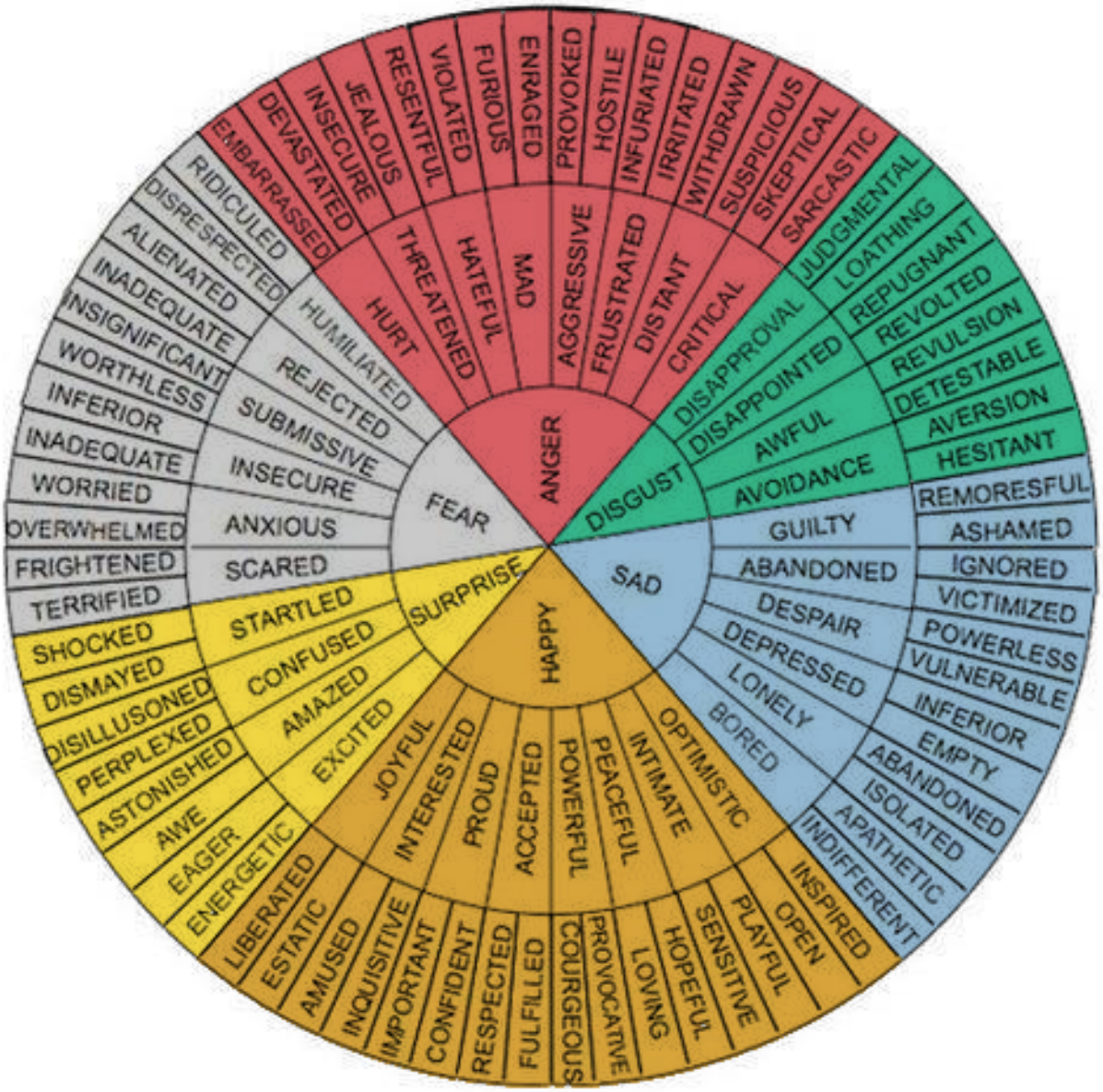
Feelings Chart



(Material from: Vocabulary.com)

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Feelings Associated With Grief and Loss

Not all people cope with grief and loss the same way. Here are some of the most common feelings and experiences.

- Difficulty concentrating
- Numbness
- Irritability
- Weepiness
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety
- Powerlessness
- Overwhelmed
- Experience sleep disturbances
- Guilt
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Apathy
- Depression
- Tense
- Pain

(Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman, 2001)

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Factors Influencing How Foster Parents Grieve

1. Characteristics of the foster parents and children relationship
   - ❖ Age of the children when they joined your family
     - Raising the children from infancy strengthens the bond between the foster parents and children
     - Foster parents can feel that they are the functional and psychological parents of the children and can find the loss of the children to be painful
   - ❖ Length of time with the family
     - Usually the longer the relationship lasts, the more severe the impact will be for both the children and the parents
   - ❖ Emotional fit
     - Was it a special match?
     - Ambivalence
       - Grieving can be prolonged and complicated if the foster parents feel uncertain about the children
     - Feelings of relief about the children leaving the family

2. Circumstances of the children's transition to and from placement
   - ❖ Was it well planned and a cooperative transition from one home to another?
   - ❖ Was it an abrupt unexpected move out of the home?
   - ❖ Was it a move where the foster parents have concerns about the children?

(Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman, 2001)

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The next section may be difficult for some parents. You are welcome to take a break, perhaps do some of the activities that you identified on your toolbox kit on page 4. Whenever you are ready, please begin the next section.

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Section 4:
Saying Goodbye

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Note to Participants

Saying goodbye to children you took care of is never an easy task. In this section, activities and strategies are offered for how you can help yourself and your family say goodbye and talk about how they are feeling about the loss. Also, the activities will help to promote a healthy and positive transition for your family.

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Either by yourself or with others identify and list the activities you will miss doing with _____.
(Name of Child)

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Identify Feelings Each Member of the Family Has

As identified in the previous section, each person grieves differently depending on their age and the attachment to the children that are leaving. In this activity, talk with your family and have them identify the feelings that they have about the children leaving the home. A list of feelings is included on page 21. If there are more people involved that are not listed, use the blank lines to add their names on it.

Yourself _____

Partner or Spouse _____

Birth Children _____

Grandparents _____

Aunts and Uncles _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

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Heartfelt Feelings Strategy

Purpose: To express your feelings regarding children leaving your family and have open communication to your support system.

Materials: "Heartfelt Feelings Strategy" Printout, markers, crayons

Directions:

1. Think about your feelings regarding ending the relationship with the children you have cared for and become attached to.
2. Choose four colors that match each of your feelings and write down those feelings on the lines provided on the printout.
3. With each of those feelings identified, color in the heart with how much of each feeling you are feeling about ending the relationship.
4. After filling in the chart, you will be able to see how you are feeling about saying goodbye. You can discuss those feelings with the people you have identified in your social support system on page 6.

NOTE: This can also be completed with all family members. Each person will need their own Heartfelt Feeling Strategy printout and it is found on the next page. If completed with your family, have each person share their feelings and worksheet to the family.

(Gil & Crenshaw, 2016)

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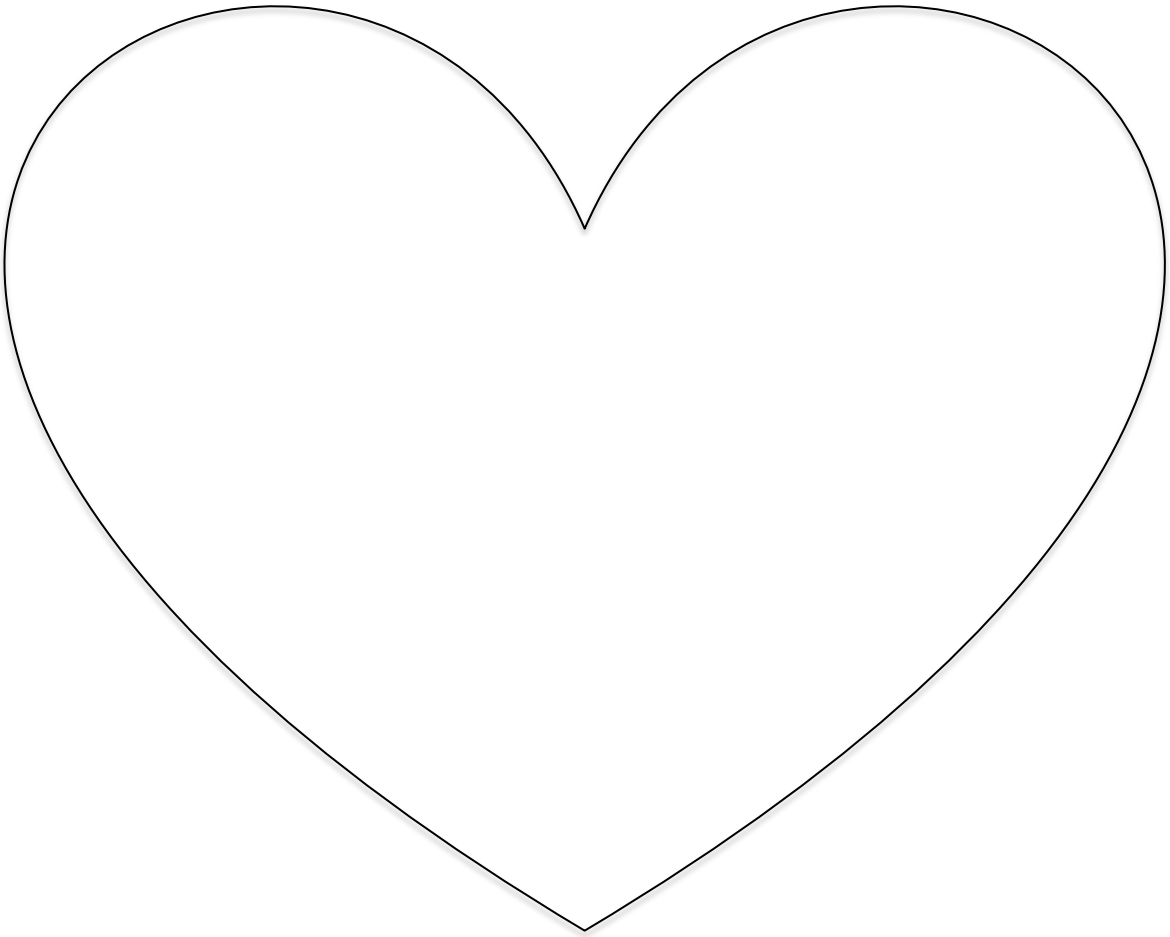

- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____
- [ ] _____

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Puzzles

Purpose: To express positives about children you cared for.

Materials: Blank puzzle pieces, markers, zip lock bag

Directions:

1. Think of some positives about the children you cared for, such as their appearance, personality, or an activity you did together.
2. Write these examples on each of the puzzle pieces.
3. Consider at all of your positive experiences.
4. Keep the puzzle for yourself.

NOTE: This activity can be completed with your family. If you are doing this with your family, on one side of the puzzle piece write their name and on the other side, write the comment. This way, you and your family are able to associate who wrote what.

(Terry, 2011)

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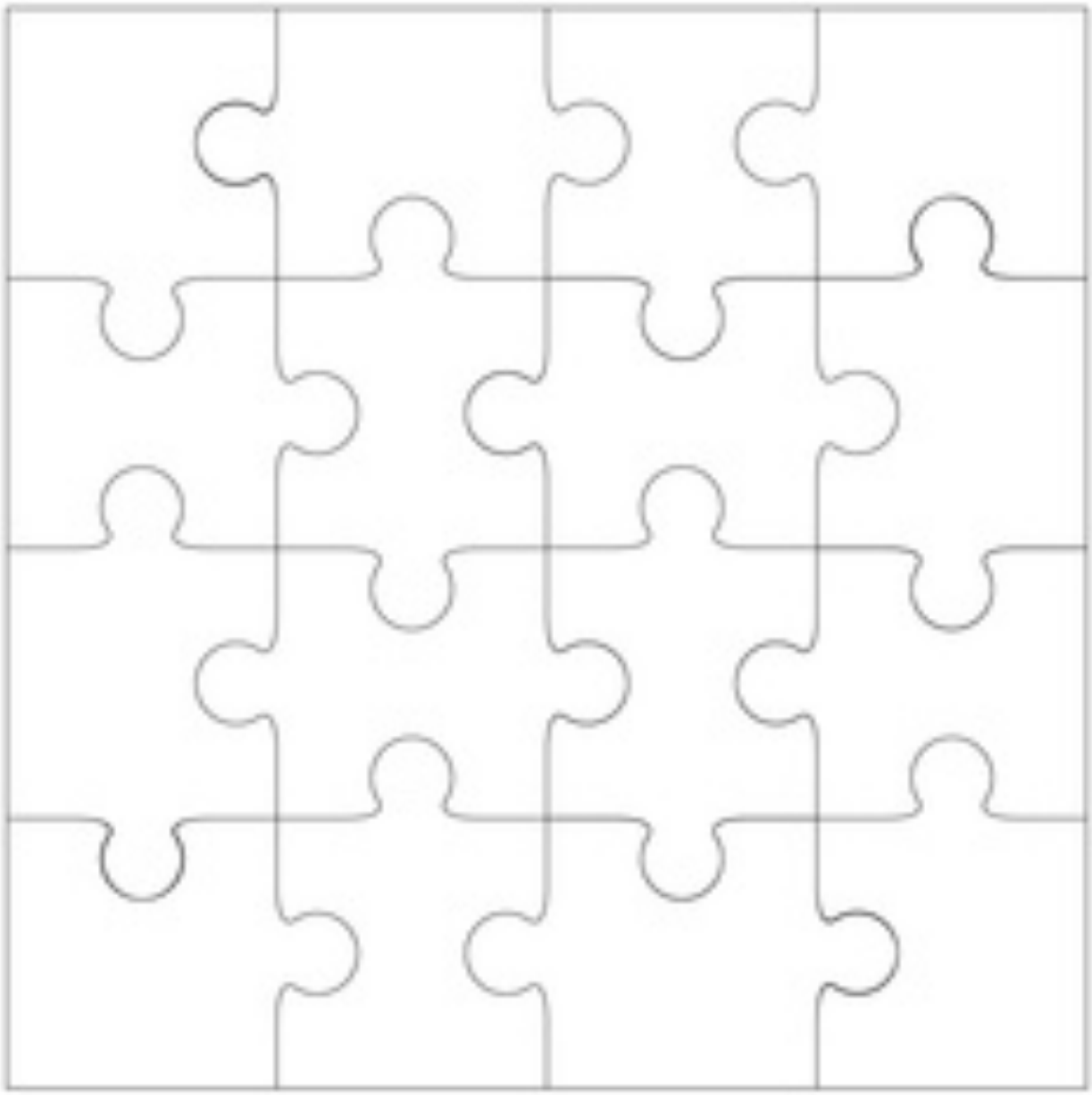

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The Worry Tree

Purpose: To allow yourself to have concerns about the children who are no longer with you.

Materials: drawing paper (optional), pens/pencil/markers, leaves, scissors, glue/tape

Directions:

1. Think about all of the worries you have about children you cared for leave your home.
2. Write those worries on the leaves. If you are creative, you can also represent your worries using symbols, words, colors, or images. Cut the leaves.
3. Draw or print out a tree then place the leaves with your worries and stick them on the tree.
4. Take a step back and see what your worries are about the children leaving your home. Take time to process those worries and find ways to help you address them. You can use this time discuss those feelings to your support system listed on page 6.

NOTE: This can also be completed with your family.

(Wrench & Naylor, 2013)

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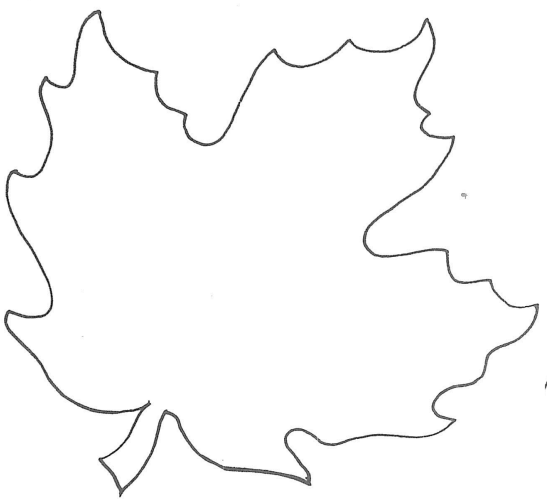
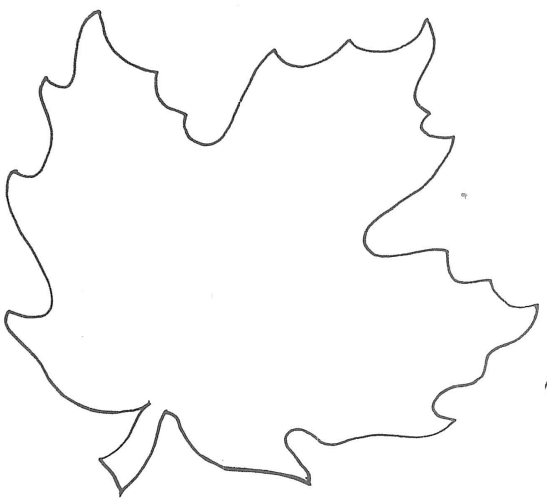
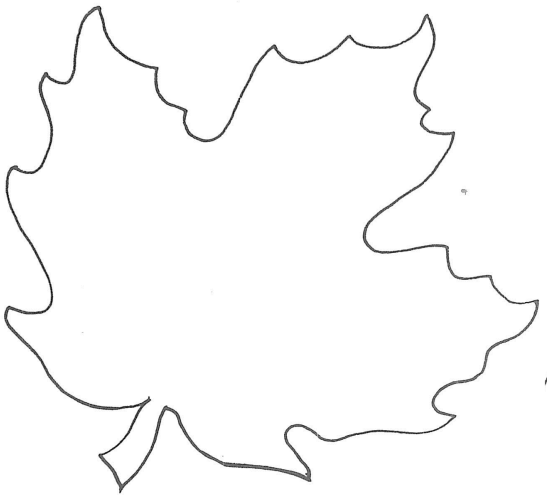
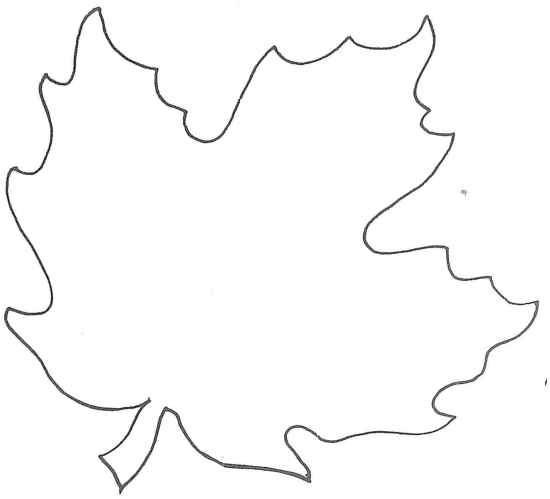
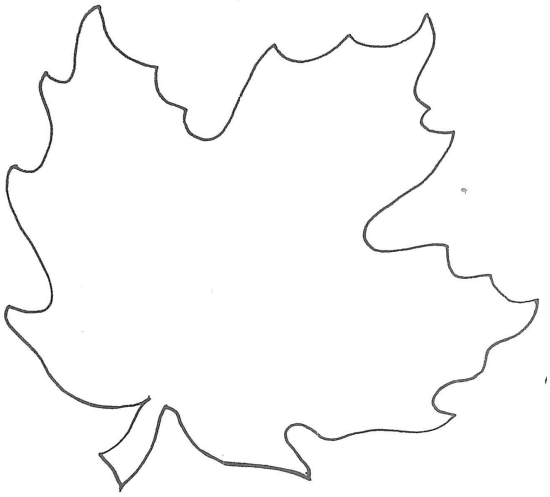
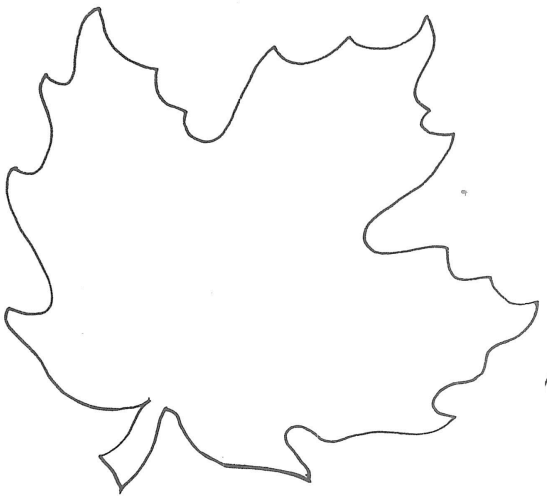

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Memory Box

Everyone with whom there has been an attachment leaves an impact in our lives, sometimes or happy and sometimes not. Now, think about the children who have left your family and make a list of items of ways in which you will remember them. This can include pictures, teddy bears, letters, clothes, blankets, artwork that was created them, etc. As foster parents, the children you took care of have become a part of your life and family, even if they are not present with you. This activity will help you reminisce about the children and remember memories that you have had with them.

NOTE: You can work on this by yourself, or with your family. If working with your family, have each member bring and share some kind of memory and place it into the memory box.

(Steen & Foster, 2011)

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Letters

Purpose: To promote healthy transitions and saying goodbye

Materials: paper, pen/pencil, envelope (optional)

Directions:

1. Think about what you would like the children who have left your care to be feeling about their time with you.
2. Make a list of those feelings and write them down on a piece of paper.
3. Give that letter to the children (optional).

NOTE: For some people, creating a letter and writing down their goodbyes can help aid in a healthy way to process their feelings.

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Section 5:
Coping

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Coping with the Loss of a Child in Care

As foster parents, you have opened your hearts and family to children. Often you have accepted children, who have many issues to deal with and taken on the large task of teaching them to trust, love, care and become responsible or independent by patterning such behavior for them. You may or may not have developed close bonds. Children who leave your home can difficult for both yourself and your family. There is no way that separation can be made easy and painless. The following are suggestions for making the separation as positive an experience as possible.

For Children that are Leaving

- Give children permission to express their feelings
- In addition to accepting children's feelings, help them identify them
- Talk straight to the children about why they are leaving and where they are going
- Make a life book or souvenir box
- Share information about the children with the social worker so the best plan can be made for the children's next placement
- Give the children permission to leave you
- Do not let the children "make" you reject them

For Your Own Children

- Talk straight with your own children about the move and why
- Give them permission to identify and express their feelings about the move
- Communicate the positive aspects of the change
- Allow your children to grieve

For Yourself

- Take time to sort out your feelings and think about where they are coming from
- Allow yourself time to grieve
- Talk to someone about your feelings
- Ask the children's social worker to involve you in the planning process and keep you informed of developments as they occur

(Material Adapted from: "Saying Goodbye: Separation and Loss Issues for Foster Parents.")

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You Know You Are "Becoming a Loss Manager" When You

- ❖ Can laugh and enjoy being with others.
- ❖ Take care of yourself.
- ❖ Can think about the children without being sad.
- ❖ Want to reach out to others in need or pain.
- ❖ Enjoy activities that you had given up.
- ❖ Share funny memories without crying.
- ❖ Recognize your emotional roller coaster is slowing down.
- ❖ Can actually see the progress you've made.

CAUTION: Don't get alarmed if you're suddenly feeling the pain of grief again. This doesn't mean you are regressing; these feelings will come up from time to time when you least expect them.

(Material Adapted from: "Saying Goodbye: Separation and Loss Issues for Foster Parents.")

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Additional Resources

The Just in Time Webshow l Episode 3 (S3): "The One About Grief and Loss Foster Families Experience"
By: Quality Parenting Initiative

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM1wqfrpZ5c&t=29s

In this episode, host Lora Diaz talks with foster and adoptive parent, foster parent advocate, and trainer Dania Guzman about the loss and grief that families have when a child leaves the home.

Saying Goodbye Foster Care 2014
By: nsgov
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5MI29ELUko

Parents talk about their experience saying goodbye to the foster child they were taking care of and their feelings associated with it.

UCLA TIES for Families L.I.F.T. Program (Loss Interventions for Families in Transition)

https://www.uclahealth.org/Mattel/ties-for-families/

Main: (310) 825-6110

This free program helps support foster/resource families hoping to adopt who are facing pending removal of a child to reunification or replacement with a family member or have had a child reunified with a birth family.

Services include: short-term grief counseling and grief support group services

<u>Online Support Groups</u>
In addition to all of the resources listed above, there are various online support groups available for foster parents. One of these online support groups is found at:
https://www.dailystrength.org/group/foster-care

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Final Remarks

Thank you for taking the time to complete this workbook. I hope that it has helped you and perhaps your family grieve and transition the loss. Remember that being a "loss manager" is not a one-time experience; most of us travel the pathway many times. Please use the Wellness Toolbox in Section1 when you feel you need support. Best wishes and thank you again for your commitment to child welfare.

As stated at the beginning of this workbook, this workbook on loss does not take the place of talking with professionals who are trained in addressing feelings of sadness and perhaps anger. Please be certain to contact your agency's child welfare worker for support.

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Self-Feedback

Here is an opportunity to give feedback to yourself on how helpful this workbook was for you. Please circle the number that best describes your opinion. It is hoped that you strongly agree with these statements, if not, think about where you might go to receive to get extra support.

1. The workbook addressed the topic of grief and loss in an organized manner.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I found the information easy to follow.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Overall, this workbook was useful to me.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I would recommend this workbook to other foster parents/families.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Comments and Suggestions:

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About the Developer

Hazelle B. Tanag, MSW (May 2017) is a graduate student from California State University Long Beach, School of Social Work with a Child and Family Wellbeing concentration. Hazelle plans to work with children and families in the child welfare system after graduation. She aspires to become an adoption social worker. Hazelle is passionate about and dedicated to advocating for children and all their families.

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