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## MODULE 5

### Providing Support to the Child, Family, and Caregivers

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Training Time: 90 minutes (1 hour 30 minutes)

#### Key Learning Points

1. Supportive adults and caregivers are critical to the healing process for traumatized children.
2. “Resource parents” (i.e., foster parents, relatives, legal guardians, and adoptive parents) have some of the most challenging roles in the child welfare system.
3. Child welfare workers should be supportive of resource parents.
4. Module 5 emphasizes Essential Elements 7 and 8:
  7. Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.
  8. Provide support and guidance to the child’s family and caregivers.

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## ACTIVITY 5A

### LECTURE

#### Essential Element 7: Support and Promote Positive and Stable Relationships in the Life of the Child

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Activity Time: 5 minutes

#### Materials Needed

- *Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 29–30
- PowerPoint Sides 99–101

#### Trainer Activities

- Cover the following content in lecture format, using PowerPoint Slide 101 to discuss Essential Element 7: *Support and promote positive and stable relationships in the life of the child.*

- Why is this essential?
- Children form and maintain relationships with important figures in their lives through bonding and attachment. Being separated from an attachment figure, particularly under traumatic and uncertain circumstances, can be very stressful for a child.
- Within the child welfare system, the risk of separation from parents, siblings, and other important figures in a child’s life is common, through removal from the home, multiple foster home placements, or changes in school and/or community. In order to ensure and maintain psychological safety and positive attachments, establishing permanency for children in the child welfare system is critical.
- Child welfare workers can play a huge role in encouraging and promoting the positive relationships in a child’s life and minimizing the extent to which these relationships are disrupted by constant changes in placement. If a parent or caregiver is not available following a traumatic event, it is important for child welfare workers to understand that other familiar and positive figures, such as teachers, neighbors, siblings, and/or relatives, may be necessary to provide comfort and consistency to a child. Depending on the age of a child, friends may also play an important role in supporting a child who has been exposed to trauma. Promoting these positive relationships is critical to a child’s sense of safety and well-being, particularly during a stressful time.

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## **ACTIVITY 5B**

### **LECTURE**

#### **Essential Element 8: Provide Support and Guidance to the Child’s Family and Caregivers**

**Activity Time: 5 minutes**

#### **Materials Needed**

- *Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 31–32
- PowerPoint Slide 102

## Trainer Activities

- Cover the following content in lecture format, using PowerPoint Slide 105 to discuss Essential Element 8: *Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers.*
  - Why is this essential?
  - Treatment research has demonstrated that one key factor influencing children's psychological recovery from traumatic events is the degree of support they receive from their caregivers.
  - Children experience their world within the context of their family relationships. Parents, kin, and other caregivers are the full-time and long-term supports for their children, and they will typically be in the child's life longer than will the child welfare or mental health professional. In many cases, the family system is experiencing traumatic stress along with the child, and promoting resilience and coping skills among family members also prepares them for future challenges. Finally, family members are critical participants in service planning and delivery within systems of care.
  - Resource families have some of the most challenging and emotionally draining roles in the entire child welfare system. They must be prepared to welcome a new child into their home at any hour of the day or night, to manage a wide array of emotions and behaviors, and to cope with agency regulations, policies, and paperwork. They are expected to provide mentoring support and aid to birth families while at the same time attaching to the children and youth in their care. They also have to simultaneously prepare youth in their care for reunification with their family or for the possibility of adoption or legal guardianship.
  - Relatives who care for children and youth face many of the challenges that all resource parents face, and several that are unique. Unlike foster families who are not related to the young people for whom they care, relatives may not have been seeking this role at this time in their lives. However, they have stepped up to the challenge in order to be there in a time of need or crisis in their family. Thus, they are often dealing with their own conflicting emotions and experiences of trauma and crisis. The demands on relatives can be overwhelming: they must meet the needs of the children they love and respond to the requirements of the agency and courts while, at the same time, they may also be sorting out their own feelings about the children's parents and the situation that has brought the children to their home.

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## ACTIVITY 5C

### DISCUSSION OR VIDEO EXERCISE (Optional Activity)

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Activity Time: 30 minutes

**TRAINER TIP:** If it is not possible to purchase one of the suggested videos for Activity 5C, an alternative exercise is to pass out the 2 Supplemental Handouts: *The Invisible Suitcase: Behavioral Challenges of Traumatized Children* and *What Children and Youth in Foster Care Want You to Know*, and ask participants to discuss and add to the information presented in the handouts. You can also adapt and use the questions that are suggested for discussion of the video.

### Materials Needed

- DVD: Digital Stories (*More Than a Case File* (2006), *In Our Own Voices* (2002), or *What Made a Difference?* (2003). Ordering information can be found in the Materials Checklist or Appendix C. *(optional)*
  - Especially relevant are the following stories: Joe, Jennifer, Jimmy, Alexandra and Aaron.
- DVD: *Multiple Transitions: A Young Child's Point of View on Foster Care and Adoption*. Ordering information can be found in the Materials Checklist or Appendix C. *(optional)*
- Supplemental Handout: *The Invisible Suitcase: Behavioral Challenges of Traumatized Children*
- Supplemental Handout: *What Children and Youth in Foster Care Want You to Know*
- *Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 31–32

### Trainer Activities

- You can select one of the videos listed above to illustrate a child's or adolescent's experience within the child welfare system.
- When showing the video, position attendees so that everyone can see the TV screen well.
- Ask for general reflections about the video, then continue with the following questions and discussion:

- While watching the video, what did you learn or think about from a new perspective about how trauma is experienced by children and/or adolescents? What surprised you? What did you hear that may have reframed something you already knew?
- Augment answers with ideas from the *Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 29–32.
- Summarize this activity by saying: Children and youth in foster care lack stability in their lives. They often are required to change foster homes unexpectedly and, in doing so, must adapt quickly to new communities and environments. Children in foster care often change schools as well and lose friends as a result. Many children also experience turnover in their social workers and therapists. Children with significant trauma histories will have a strong response to these losses, which reinforce the worldview that life is not predictable and that relationships don't last. This worldview can lead to behaviors that further threaten the child's ability to develop and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships. There are many strategies that child welfare workers can use to support and promote relationships and stability for children in the child welfare system, and to support the adults who care for them.

**IF PRESENTING THIS TRAINING IN TWO FULL DAYS,  
TAKE A ONE-HOUR LUNCH BREAK HERE**

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## **ACTIVITY 5D**

### **CASE VIGNETTE**

#### **Chris**

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**Activity Time: 35 minutes**

#### **Materials Needed**

- Supplemental Handout: *Case Vignette—Chris*
- Flip chart
- Markers
- *Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 29–32

## Trainer Activities

- Divide participants into three to five small groups.
- Instruct the small groups to read Supplemental Handout: *Case Vignette—Chris*, including the “Presenting Situation,” “Background/History,” and “Evaluation/Assessment” sections.
- Generate specific ideas about helpful strategies, education, and guidance for the adults who are likely to be involved in Chris’s life following his departure from the hospital. These adults may include his biological mother, a resource/foster parent, his grandmother, or others.
- Encourage participants to refer to pp. 29–32 of the *Comprehensive Guide* to help them generate ideas.
- When 2 minutes remain for the small group discussion, ask groups to choose three strategies for helping Chris, his family, and his caregivers, and rationales for recommending those strategies.
- Bring the large group together to hear reports from the breakout groups about their top three strategies and rationales.
- Summarize the activity by emphasizing these points: In many instances, children have already experienced trauma, or possibly multiple traumas, by the time child welfare workers become involved. In this vignette, Chris experienced the trauma of the severe burn, most likely ongoing neglect from his substance-abusing mother, long-term hospitalization and painful medical treatments, and separation from his mother. He may also be moved to an out-of-family placement upon his release from the hospital until and if his grandmother can become certified as a medical foster care provider. Sometimes it is overwhelming to think that we arrive too late to prevent much of this trauma. However, we have much opportunity to help with the healing, perhaps most importantly by supporting the people who provide primary stability (emotional and physical) and caretaking for the child.

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## ACTIVITY 5E

### SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS 7 AND 8

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Activity Time: 15 minutes

#### Materials Needed

- Supplemental Handout: *Bringing It Back to Work: Essential Elements 7 and 8*

#### Trainer Activities

- Distribute Supplemental Handout: *Bringing It Back to Work: Essential Elements 7 and 8* to all participants.
- Instruct participants on how to complete the worksheets:
  - Refer to the Supplemental Handout: *Bringing It Back to Work: Essential Elements 7 and 8*.
  - For this activity, ask participants to focus on the strategies that address Essential Elements 7 and 8. Ask the participants to review the strategies listed under each of these Essential Elements.
  - Ask participants to mark an “X” in up to three boxes next to the ideas that they think they would MOST like to emphasize in their daily child welfare practice for each of these Essential Elements.
- Debrief: For Essential Element 7, ask participants to call out a few of the strategies that they would most like to emphasize in their daily child welfare practice, and why. Do the same for Essential Element 8.