

A woman with curly hair and a young girl with a large afro are sitting at a table, smiling and playing with colorful wooden blocks. The woman is holding a blue block, and the girl is holding a red block. They are both looking at the blocks with interest. The background is a bright, indoor setting with a white wall and a yellow object hanging on the wall.

*Why We Care About  
Family Time/Visits*



*Understand the  
Harm of Removal*

# ACE: Adverse Childhood Experience

- A traumatic experience in a person's life occurring before the age of 18 that the person recalls as an adult

The loss of a parent and placement into foster care is an ACE





# ACES

*A person with an ACE score of 4 or more have high rates of stress, uncontrollable anger, mental health problems, and involvement in domestic violence.*

*The average number of ACEs reported by adults formerly in foster care was 6 and 1/3 reported 8 or more ACEs.*

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Psychosocial Well-Being of Women Who Were in Foster Care as Children, **Delilah Bruskas, PhD, RN; Dale H Tessin, MS**, Perm J 2013 Summer;17(3):XX-XX

# ACES in Foster Care

- Placement into foster care does not stop the accrual of additional ACEs
- ACEs associated with physical neglect and living in a dysfunctional household decrease in foster care
- However, the rate of emotional and physical abuse remains the same while in foster care

# Loss



*Children in foster care experience many separations*

- *Home*
- *Entire immediate and extended family*
- *Pets*
- *Friends*
- *Community*

*Results in cumulative traumatic childhood experiences and losses*

*Multiple placements exacerbate trauma and decrease opportunities to establish an attachment to a primary caregiver*

# *Ambiguous Loss*

*Physical absence with psychological presence.*

*A loved one is missing physically—lost, kidnapped, disappeared, but kept present psychologically because they might reappear.*

# *Ambiguous Loss*

- \* Ambiguous loss is unclear loss.*
- \* Ambiguous loss is traumatic loss.*
- \* Ambiguous loss is a relational disorder.*
- \* Ambiguous loss is externally caused.*
- \* Ambiguous loss is an uncanny loss—confusing and incomprehensible.*



# *Ambiguous Loss*

*Preoccupied*

*Left wondering*

*Without any answers*

*Leads to limbo - blocked  
from grieving, coping,  
healing,*

*Erodes resilience*

*Boss, 2006*





## *How are children fairing in care?*

*Research has found that children who have been placed in foster care are:*

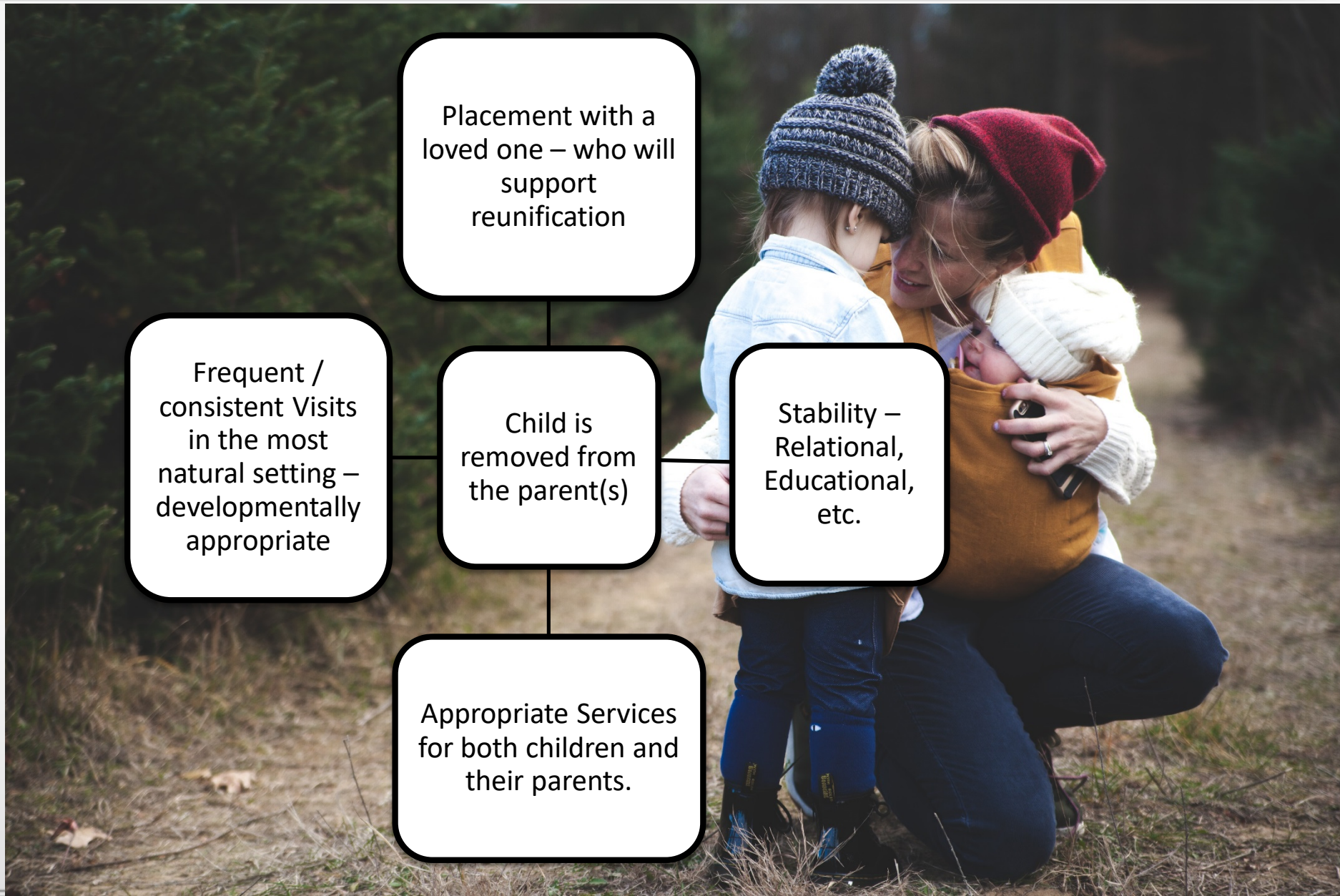
- 7 times as likely to experience depression*
- 6 times as likely to exhibit behavioral problems*
- 5 times as likely to feel anxiety*
- 3 times as likely to have attention deficit disorder, hearing impairments and vision issues*
- 2 times as likely to suffer from learning disabilities, developmental delays, asthma, obesity and speech problems*

*[Mental and Physical Health of Children in Foster Care](#)*

*[Mental and Physical Health of Children](#)*

*<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/10/14/peds.2016-1118>*

*If removal is necessary - how do we reduce the harm of removal?*



# Visits Matter

*Children who have consistent, frequent contact with their family while in foster care have more positive experiences:*

- A greater likelihood of reunification*
- Shorter stays in out-of-home care*
- Increased chances that the reunification will be lasting*
- Overall improved emotional well-being and positive adjustment to placement*

*Weintraub, A. Information packet parent-child visiting. National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work, 2008.*



# Even More Important for Very Young Children



*Infants and young children experience distress over being removed from a parent and placed in a strange environment.*

*Unable to use words to express their grief over losing their parents, young children often experience emotional trauma when removed abruptly and for extended periods of time.*

*Children's reactions to and ability to cope with separation from a parent depend on their age and developmental stage.*

Goldsmith, Douglas F., David Oppenheim and Janine Wanlass. "Separation and Reunification: Using Attachment Theory and Research to Inform Decision Affecting the Placements of Children in Foster Care." *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 55(2), 2004, 1-13.

Wright, Lois E. *Toolbox No. 1: Using Visitation to Support Permanency*. Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press, 2001, 8-9.



*The younger the child and the longer the period of uncertainty and separation from the primary caregiver, the greater the risk of emotional and developmental harm to the child.*

*Visitation promotes healthy attachment, provides an opportunity to heal damaged relationships, and mediates the trauma of removal.*

*Children need to know that their parent cares for them and is available to them.*

*American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care. "Developmental Issues for Young Children in Foster Care." *Pediatrics* 105(5), 2000, 1146.*

*Edited by Charles H. Zeanah, Jr., MD. *Handbook of Infant Mental Health, Third Edition.* Guilford Press, 2009.*

*T Smargia, Margaret. *Visitation with Infants and Toddlers in Foster Care: What Judges and Attorneys Need to Know.* American Bar Association and ZERO TO THREE, 2007, 5.*

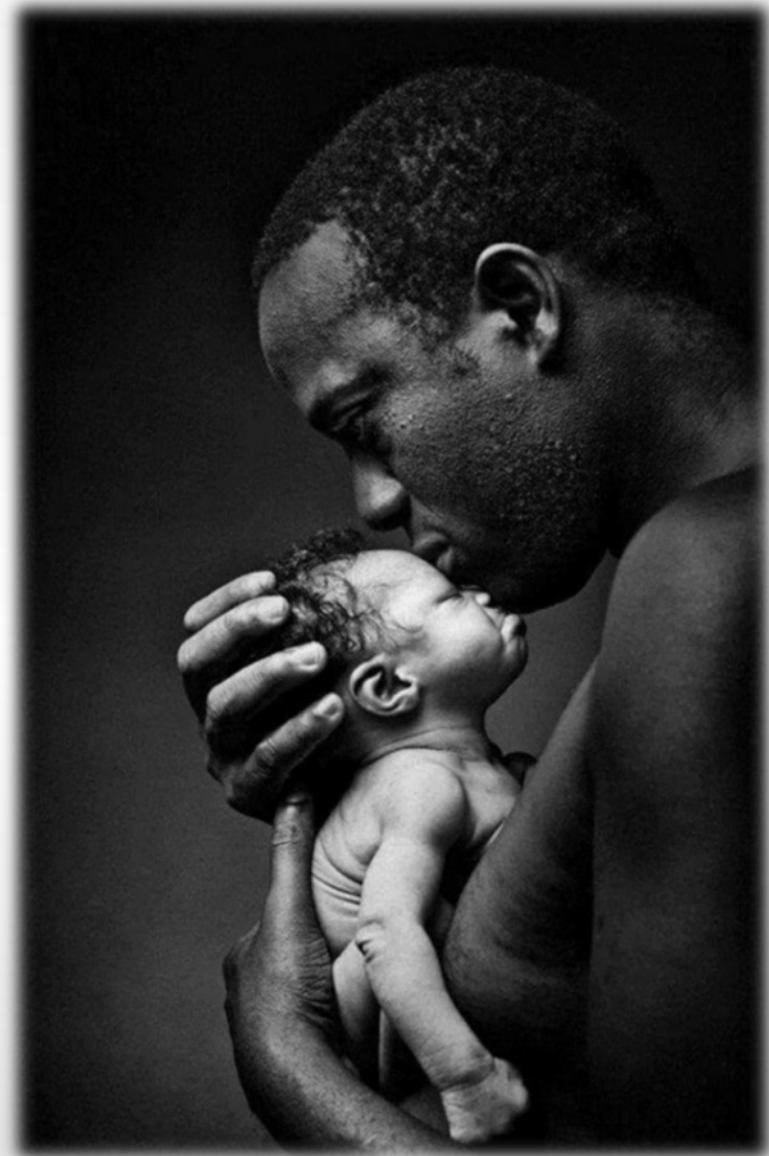
Their memory capacity is such that they cannot hold the parent in mind for long periods of time between contacts.

Very young children are dependent on close physical proximity and frequent, repeated interactions with a parent in order to develop an attachment relationship.

Jones Harden, Brenda. *Infants in the Child Welfare: A Developmental Framework for Policy and Practice, Zero To Three*, 2007, p. 252.

Edited by Charles H. Zeanah, Jr., MD. *Handbook of Infant Mental Health, Third Edition*. Guilford Press, 2009.

Hill, Sheri & Solchany, Joanne. "Mental Health Assessments for Infants and Toddlers," *American Bar Association Child Law Practice*, Vol. 24, no.9, 2005, p. 139.



# Reactions - Grief and Loss

- visits remind the child of his/her loss, and each visit includes both a reunion and another separation.
- well documented in divorce research:
  - More than half...were tearful, moody, and pervasively sad.
  - One third or more showed a variety of acute depressive symptoms, including sleeplessness, restlessness, difficulties concentrating, deep sighing, feelings of emptiness, play inhibition, compulsive overeating, and other symptoms.

Beyer, Marty. "Parent-Child Visits as an Opportunity for Change." The Prevention Report. The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice. No. 1 (1999): 1-12. 6 June 2008





# *Reactions*

*However, not having visits does not mean a child does not have any reactions to grief and loss.*

Wentz, Rose, National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning.

[http://www.clarola.org/index.php?option=com\\_mtree&task=att\\_download&link\\_id=83&cf\\_id=24](http://www.clarola.org/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=83&cf_id=24)



*It is rare that having NO contact of any type with a parent is in the best interest of a child.*

Fanshel, David,  
and Shinn, Eugene. *Children in Foster Care. A Longitudinal Investigation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, pp. 487-488; Weinstein, Eugene A. *The Self-Image of the Foster Child.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960.

# *Visitation Laws*



*Darlene Bernard*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

# A Right of the Family

- Must be in the child's best interest
- Early, consistent, and frequent visitation is crucial for maintaining parent-child relationships and making it possible for parents and children to safely reunify.
- The department shall encourage the maximum parent and child and sibling contact possible, when it is in the best interest of the child, including regular visitation and participation by the parents in the care of the child while the child is in placement.

RCWA § 13.34.136

# *Visitation is not a Carrot or a Stick*

- Shall not be used as a sanction for parents failures.*
- Shall not be used as an incentive or punishment for children in care.*
- Can only be limited in order to protect the child from a risk of harm that is an actual risk, not speculation*
  
- RCWA § 13.34.136.*

# *Does Reasonable Efforts Require Providing Appropriate Visitation?*

*Federal law clarifies that time-limited family reunification services include -*

*Services and activities designed to facilitate access to and visitation of children by parents and siblings.*

*42 U.S.C.A. § 629a*



# *Foster Parent Biological Parent Relationships Matter*



*When contact is characterized by cooperation rather than conflict between foster and biological parents, the child can maintain a sense of belonging to both families* ([Neil, Beek, & Schofield, 2003](#)).

# *Balancing Act*

*Normal family interactions Ensuring child safety*





# *Assessing Family Time Plans*

*Purpose of visits and other contact*

*Assessment of safety - in a visit*

*Supervision*

*Location*

*Frequency*

*Length*

*Support provided*



*Plans should progress with parent's ability  
to meet their child's needs*

# *Developmentally Appropriate*

*Consider the age and developmental level of each child - they may have different needs*

*What is normal parent-child interaction for this age?*

*How can family time be structured to enable parent to support the child's development?*

# *Special Consideration Young Children - Birth to 5 Years*

*2,900+ young children entered  
dependency court system in  
2017*

*Approximately 60% of court's  
caseload are children under 5*

*They stay in care longer and  
return home less frequently  
than older children*



*Source – Dependent Children in Washington State:  
Case Timeliness and Outcomes, 2017 Annual Report -  
WSCCR*

# Schedule for Young Children

## Best practice

Birth - 18 mos

Daily

## Minimum for developmentally appropriate visits

Birth - 18 mos

1 hour, 3x week

18 mos - 3 yrs

1.5 hours, 3x

week

3 - 5 years

2 hours, 3x week

*Days should not be consecutive*