

## **Child Development & Separation**

### **SCHOOL-AGED**

(6-11 years)



### Cognitive Development

- The child has developed concrete operations and better understands cause and effect.
- The child has limited perspective taking ability. She is beginning to understand that things happen to her which are not her fault.
- The world is experienced in concrete terms. The child is most comfortable if her environment is structured and she understands the rules.
- The child has a better perspective regarding time: can differentiate days and weeks but cannot fully comprehend months or years.

### Emotional Development

- Self-esteem is strongly affected by how well she does in her daily activities, including academic performance and play activities.
- She is anxious when she does not have structure and when she does not understand the "rules" or expectations of a new situation.
- The child's primary identification is with her family and her self-esteem is tied to people's perception of her family's worth.

### Social Development

- The child can form significant attachments to adults and to peers.
- The child derives security from belonging to a same-sex social group.
- The child recognizes that being a foster child is somehow "different" from the other children.

- The child is fiercely loyal and exclusive in her relationships.
- Her value system has developed to include "right" and "wrong," and she experiences guilt when she has done something wrong.

### **Implications for Separation and Placement**

- The child can develop new attachments and turn to adults to meet her needs, which increases her ability to cope in stressful situations.
- The child's perception of the reason for the separation may be distorted. In her concrete world, someone must be blamed, including caseworker, foster caregiver, agency, or herself.
- The child will compare foster caregivers to her parents, and the caregivers will lose.
- The loss of her peer group and friends may be almost as traumatic as loss of her parents. Making new friends may be difficult. The child may be embarrassed and self-conscious about her "foster child" status, and she may feel isolated.
- The child will be very confused if the "rules", expectations, and cultural norms in the foster home are different from what she is used to.
- The child has a better understanding of time. Placements of a few months can be tolerated, if the child understands she is eventually to go home. Longer placements may be experienced as permanent.
- If the child was placed after some perceived misbehavior, she may feel responsible and guilty, and anxious about her parents accepting her back.
- Each placement, in effect, is cross-cultural, in that the specific culture of each family is unique. The degree of difference between the culture of the child's former home and the child's foster home will vary. The child may experience confusion, hostility, and resentment regarding these differences.
- “During this period, children are developing their ability to understand cause, effect, and time. They are beginning to form concrete and logical thoughts. Grief will show itself in school or learning problems, and preoccupation with the loss of caregivers and or related worries. Foster parents should be available, sympathetic listeners and help teachers and other significant adults understand that the child's behavior and performance is related to his or her overwhelming sadness” (Berrier 2001).