

# **Advocating for the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care**

**Training Curriculum for Foster Parents**

*Colorado Department of Human Services*

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Many thanks also go to the Advisory Committee members listed below who provided us with their thoughtful feedback and encouragement on the original curriculum and the adaptation for foster parents. (With the exception of Arthur Atwell and Mary Griffin, titles listed were those held at the time of the original development of the manual and curriculum.)

### *Caseworker/Supervisor Curriculum*

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## **Introduction**

In order to improve the educational outcomes for children in the child welfare system, greater coordination needs to occur between the child welfare and education systems. The Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth and Families contracted with the Catherine E. Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy, Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine to help the state make that goal a reality.

A major component of this work was to develop a manual and curriculum for child welfare supervisors and caseworkers in Colorado to increase their understanding of the various laws affecting their coordination with the education system on behalf of children in the child welfare system and to provide suggestions and resources for including the educational issues of children as a part of regular casework practice. Once that curriculum was developed, it was adapted here for use in training foster parents in 2008 and then updated in April, 2010.

In addition to the development of these training materials, issues which were perceived as barriers to coordination between the child welfare and education systems were identified and a series of statewide annual forums held by the Colorado Department of Human Services beginning in 2005 to discuss those issues, share strategies and develop local plans for improving collaboration between child welfare, education and other related systems.

## **A Brief Review of the Curriculum**

The goal of this curriculum is to broaden the knowledge and enhance the skills of foster parents so they can support the educational needs of the children placed in their home. Divided into modules, this curriculum is flexible and can be used in a way that is appropriate for individual training audiences and trainers. The training is to be delivered at the county level by two trainers, one a foster parent and the other from either child welfare or education. It is intended to occur over a one and a half day-long session.

A manual, *Advocating for the Educational Needs of Children in Out-of-Home Care*, is the companion to this curriculum (referred to as “the Manual” throughout). The Manual is the basis for all information this training covers. Therefore, trainers should be very familiar with its contents and layout. Trainers should be prepared to refer training participants to the Manual for additional information and guidance.

Module 1, *Overview of the Training*, allows trainers to welcome participants, introduce the goals of the training, and discuss the handouts, activity materials and companion Manual.

Module 2, *Why We Care*, is a basic overview of the factors that contribute to the educational success of children in the child welfare system. More importantly, it provides opportunities for discussions about the role foster parents can play in helping children succeed in school.

Module 3, *Promoting School Stability and Daily Educational Success* provides information on the initial steps foster parents can take when a child is first placed in their home to address the child’s educational needs and create a system of communication and information sharing with the school. School stability, strategies for easing transitions, confidentiality, enrollment and credit issues will be covered. Participants will also discuss strategies for promoting daily educational success including issues of sensitivity in the classroom, how foster parents can support education at home and the role of extra-curricular activities in helping children and youth build confidence.

Module 4, *What to do if You Have a Concern?*, gives foster parents guidance in the steps they can take when they have a concern about their foster child's learning, from modifications they can ask of teachers to referrals for special education. Topics include Response to Intervention (RtI), eligibility and services under special education, and educational surrogates.

Module 5, *Special Populations*, provides information on the youngest and oldest children in the child welfare system. Participants will learn about the unique educational needs of children from birth through age five as well as older youth transitioning out of the system, and how best to address them.

Module 6, *Wrap-up*, allows participants to discuss what they have learned in the training and how they will apply what they have learned in caring for their foster children.

## Module 1: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Manual Chapter(s)
<p><b>Total:</b> 20 minutes</p> <p><i>Introductions/Icebreaker:</i> 10 minutes</p> <p><i>Review materials:</i> 5 minutes</p> <p><i>Review key themes and ground rules:</i> 5 minutes</p>	<p><b>Module 1:</b> <i>Overview of the Training</i></p> <p>Introductions/Icebreaker</p> <p>Orient the participants to the training</p> <p>Review the contents of the Manual and Appendices</p> <p>Set ground rules</p>	<p>Introductions/icebreaker</p> <p>Review agenda/training packet</p> <p>Review contents of the Manual and Appendices</p> <p>Review key themes in the training</p> <p>Review ground rules</p>	<p>Entire Manual</p>

## **Module 1: Overview of the Training**

### **Time**

Approximately 20 minutes

### **Rationale**

In order to engage participants and enable them to fully understand the benefits of the training, participants should be introduced to each other and the trainer and become familiar with the goals and purpose of the training and its primary materials.

### **Learning Objectives**

When this module is complete, participants should be able to:

- Understand the goals and agenda for the training.
- List the major themes of the training
- Understand what the Manual is and how it should be used

### **Activities**

- Welcome and introductions/icebreaker
- Review training agenda, learning objectives, goals of the training and major themes.
- Introduce the Manual, how it is organized and how it will be used. Also explain that while the manual is written for child welfare caseworkers, it contains much information that is useful for foster parents as well.

### **Materials Needed for this Module**

- ✓ Training packets
- ✓ Manuals
- ✓ Refrigerator Magnets (Optional, see p. 1-4.)
- ✓ “Clackers” for each participant

The trainer may want to use PowerPoint slides to list the goals of the training and the learning objectives for each module.

### **Advanced Preparation:**

The curriculum itself does not contain all of the information you will need to convey to the participants.

It will list topics and important points to emphasize but the detailed information for each topic is only found in the Manual.

Make sure to review the chapters of the Manual that are listed under “Advanced Preparation” within each module before the training session!

### **Handouts for the training:**

The curriculum itself only includes the handouts outlining the activities in the training (e.g. the case studies used in Module 3). Since one of the objects of this curriculum is to permit participants to become familiar with the contents of the Manual, we have left in the Appendices of the Manual the relevant checklists, tools, etc. that might be used to assist



## **Advanced Preparation**

Review contents of the Manual and Appendices.

Make up an agenda for the training using the lesson plans at the beginning of each module as a guide and reflecting the time schedules for the trainees at that particular site.

Prepare training packets for each participant containing the training agenda, exercise materials, the Manual and any supplemental information.

Make sure that flip charts, markers, TV/DVD player, and any additional audio/visual equipment are set up in the training room.

Prepare a “Parking Lot” list on a flip chart in the training room.

## **Trainer’s Instructions**

- Begin the session by welcoming the group and introducing yourself.
- Ask the participants to introduce themselves and tell the group about a fond memory they have of school. When they are finished, tell them that this training will help them create similarly fond memories of school for the children and youth in their care.
- Highlight the goals of the training which are:
  - To understand the educational challenges many children in care face and what factors help these children succeed educationally.
  - To understand what it means to support education at home, be an educational advocate for children and collaborate effectively with the education

participants in doing the exercises. We have referenced these materials under the section, “Advanced Preparation” within each module of the curriculum. During the training, you can refer participants to the Appendices for those documents or, if you prefer, you can copy them from the Manual and hand them out.

system.

- To learn how to use the Manual and apply what's learned in your everyday care of your foster child.
- Walk quickly through the training packet, starting with the agenda for the training, and briefly describe the packet's contents.
- Introduce the Manual, review its contents (especially the Table of Contents, use of section numbers in the text, the Index and the Appendices) and how it will be used.
- Go over the following key themes of the training:
  - Emphasize that we're not going into a great deal of detail about all of the laws and policies involved in collaboration with the education system. Instead, we will learn how to use the information in the Manual to support children's education at home, resolve issues with the school and monitor children's education.
  - Emphasize that the most important aspect of being a good advocate for children is to monitor the child's educational progress, provide support for education at home, make sure the child's education is supported by all of the adults involved, know who to contact when issues of concern arise, and ask the right questions.
  - Emphasize that "simple strategies can make a difference" – small gestures they and others can use to encourage children in the school setting, and at home, to do well educationally and stay engaged. Tell them that they will see a DVD in the next module that will include examples of these small gestures and you will be referring back to

These themes are points you will want to return to throughout the training!

these examples throughout the training.

- Underscore the importance of stability for the educational success of children in foster care. Explain how important it is for foster parents to feel comfortable with caring for the child before he or she is placed and to head off crises by addressing problems at school early so they don't undermine the placement.

- Go over the ground rules for the training:
  - All participants should use language that promotes collaboration between systems.
  - Systemic issues won't be discussed (those will be addressed in other forums and should be listed in the "parking lot.") Instead, we will concentrate on what everyone can do within the system as it exists now.
  - Tell them that they can use their "clackers" whenever anyone uses an acronym they don't understand!
- Ask for and address questions. Mention that questions and comments are welcome at any time.
- Encourage participation! Throughout the discussions encourage participants to talk about issues they have encountered in coordinating with the education system as well as positive experiences and successful strategies they have used.
- Introduce the next module, *Why We Care*.

You might have refrigerator magnets with the motto "Remember Stability" available to hand out at this point in the training.

## Module 2: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Manual Chapter(s)
<p><b>Total:</b> 65 minutes</p> <p><i>DVD:</i> 20 minutes</p> <p><i>Overview: Educational outcomes, factors for success, role of foster parents:</i> 20 minutes</p> <p><i>Scavenger hunt/Report back:</i> 25 minutes</p>	<p><b>Module 2:</b> <i>Why We Care</i></p> <p>Educational outcomes of children in child welfare system</p> <p>Factors that make a difference in helping children succeed in school.</p> <p>Role of foster parents in making a difference</p> <p>Practice using the Manual</p>	<p>Show DVD: <i>Speaking Out</i></p> <p>Discuss educational outcomes, factors for success</p> <p>Ask participants what they see as their role in supporting education</p> <p>Scavenger Hunt – finding answers in Manual</p> <p>Report back</p>	<p>Chapter 1</p>

## **Module 2: Why We Care**

### **Time**

Approximately 65 minutes

### **Rationale**

For a variety of reasons, children in care face special challenges in the school setting and often lack the support and individual attention from caring adults that other children enjoy. Many enter the child welfare system already behind in school. They experience the trauma of being removed from their homes and their worries about parents and siblings make it difficult for them to focus on their school work. They immediately become “foster children”—a label which, despite the best intentions of caring adults, can carry with it the baggage of stereotyping, lowered expectations and social isolation. For many children, this initial upheaval is then compounded by frequent changes in placement that mean changes in schools. They can fall further behind academically and become more alienated socially.

Yet the need for a good education is especially critical for these children. Youth in the child welfare system enter adulthood with fewer resources to fall back on than most other children whose families are available to provide support. Because of their unique circumstances, however, most need more help than other children in order to achieve that success. Learning strategies to support education in the everyday care of foster children can make a big difference to a child’s educational success. These strategies were gathered from the research and from the experiences of staff operating model programs to improve coordination between child

welfare and education in Colorado and in other states.

### **Learning Objectives**

When this module is complete, participants should be able to:

- Discuss factors that contribute to educational success of children in out-of-home care.
- Identify what the research says about the outcomes of children in care when education is not a priority.
- Explain how foster parents, acting as educational advocates, can make a difference.
- Become familiar with the resources in the Manual.

### **Activities**

- View the DVD of youth in care discussing their educational experiences (*Speaking Out*).
- Large Group Activity: “Scavenger Hunt”

### **Materials Needed for this Module**

- ✓ TV with a DVD player
- ✓ “Speaking Out” DVD
- ✓ Manuals
- ✓ Flip charts and markers
- ✓ Large group activity handout: “Scavenger Hunt”
- ✓ Prizes for “Scavenger Hunt”

### **Advanced Preparation**

View and become familiar with the *Speaking Out* DVD of the youth discussing their educational experiences while in the child welfare system.

Read Chapter 1 and Appendix A of the Manual.

Make sure the TV and DVD player are set up.

Prepare a flipchart for the large group activity.

### **Trainer's Instructions**

- Introduce the module by presenting the rationale and objectives.
- Begin the module by introducing, then showing, the DVD, *Speaking Out*. Before showing the DVD explain that:
  - The youth in the DVD may not be typical of the youth who may have been placed in their home. These are kids who succeeded against all the odds and who are unusually articulate in discussing their experiences.
  - Explain that the video was produced specifically for viewing by caseworkers and, as a result, the youth were asked to focus on what caseworkers could do to help them. There may not be as much reflection about the foster homes these youth were in as they might expect. But emphasize that foster parents can make a huge difference by doing some of the small things the youth mention made a difference in their success in school. They can provide good role models, convey strong educational values, and provide structure to support school success.
- Ask participants to write down particularly memorable quotes as they watch the DVD. Also ask them what role

*Speaking Out* really gives faces and voices to the issues discussed in this training. Use examples from it and encourage participants to refer back to the DVD in discussions throughout the day.

This is a good place in the training to reinforce that simple strategies such as attending a child's band concert or putting a child's school work on your refrigerator can make a big difference! Again, key this to what was said in the DVD.

they, as foster parents, could play in each of the situations the youth describe.

- After viewing the DVD, solicit feedback from participants about what they saw and heard, discuss some of the choices of quotes participants made, and the roles they could play as foster parents.
- Highlight some of the research about the poor educational outcomes of children in the child welfare system:
  - In a study in Washington State, twice as many youth in foster care at both the elementary and secondary levels repeated a grade compared to youth not in care. (Burley & Halpern, 2001) In a study conducted in three states of youth aging out of care (the Midwest Study), 37% of the youth (compared with 22% of a comparable national sample) reported repeating a grade (Courtney, et al., 2004).
  - Youth in foster care in the Midwest Study, interviewed primarily after completing 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade, on average read at only the seventh grade level (Courtney, et al., 2004).
  - Almost 50% of third to eighth grade students in out-of-home care in Chicago scored in the bottom quartile on reading tests (Smithgall, et al., 2004).
  - Almost half of foster youth in the Midwest Study had been placed in special education at least once during their school careers (Courtney, et al., 2004).
  - In the Midwest Study, approximately 58% of youth in foster care had a high school degree at age nineteen compared with 87% of their same-age peers in a comparable national sample (Courtney,



et al., 2005).

- According to a study of alumni of foster care, more than one in five reported experiencing homelessness since being discharged from foster care. One-third lived at or below the poverty level (three times the national rate) (Pecora, et al., 2005).
- Point out that what the youth say in the DVD closely parallels what the research has found are the key factors that make a difference in the educational outcomes of children and youth in the child welfare system. Refer to Appendix A, “*Factors that Make a Difference...*” of the Manual to illustrate this and point out the bibliography at the end of that document if they want to read more about this research. Use this as a way to introduce an overview of why it is so important to address the educational needs of children in the child welfare system:
  - Point out the major role school plays in a child’s life and refer participants to the pie chart in Chapter 1 of the Manual, illustrating a typical day in the life of a sixth grader, to make this point. Ask them if that pie chart represents how they see their foster children spend their time.
  - Ask participants what broad roles they see foster parents playing that could make a difference in helping children achieve educational success. Be sure to tie in some of what was discussed in the DVD through the use of examples. Also explain that you will get into these roles in greater detail in Module 3, *Promoting School Stability and Daily Educational Success*. Make sure the following

roles are mentioned:

- Main person communicating regularly with the school regarding the child's needs
  - Receiving, sharing (with caseworker) and reviewing school records
  - Major role model for the importance of education
  - Provider of structure at home to support education
  - Facilitator of child's participation in extra-curricular activities and school events
  - Source of encouragement to do well in school
- Move to the small group activity: "Scavenger Hunt." On the handout for this exercise there are two sets of questions labeled Group I and Group II. Divide participants into groups of five with a trainer available to facilitate and assign each group either Group I or Group II questions. Before they go into their groups, give participants the following instructions:

*In your training packets, you will find a handout called "Scavenger Hunt." The purpose of this activity is to give you some time to practice using the Manual. Each group will have a different set of two questions to research and discuss. Read each question in the set assigned to your group and when you have found the answer in the manual, write it down and note the section of the Manual where you found the answer. At the end, we'll briefly discuss your answers, as well as your experiences using the Manual. Take about 15 minutes to complete this exercise.*

- When the time is up, have the groups reassemble for the report back. Ask participants to give their answers and write these down on a flip chart. Solicit feedback about their use of the Manual and hand out prizes to everyone. Take about 10 minutes for the report back.
- Introduce the next module, *Promoting School Stability and Daily Educational Success* and explain that the group will be discussing the steps that should be taken to address educational needs when a child is first placed in their foster home and the things they can do every day to help children and youth succeed in school.

## **References**

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Pecora, P., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., White, C.R., Wiggins, T & Holmes, K. (2005), *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs*.

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Note: This research was cited in Casey Family Programs, (2007). *Fact Sheet, Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care*. Seattle, WA.: Casey Family Programs URL: [http://www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/A8991CAB-AFC1-4CF0-8121-7E4C31A2553F/1241/National\\_EdFactSheet\\_2008.pdf](http://www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/A8991CAB-AFC1-4CF0-8121-7E4C31A2553F/1241/National_EdFactSheet_2008.pdf)

**Small Group Activity:  
Scavenger Hunt**

Use the Manual to find the answers to the following questions. Be sure to indicate specifically *where* you found the answers by using the section and page numbers in the Manual.

**Group I:**

1. Do foster parents have the legal authority to make educational decisions for their foster child under special education law?
2. What is a manifestation determination?

**Group II:**

1. What program provides developmental assessments and early intervention services to children ages 0 to 3 with developmental problems?
2. Is parental consent needed to have records transferred from one school to another?

**Small Group Activity:  
Scavenger Hunt**

Use the Manual to find the answers to the following questions. Be sure to indicate specifically *where* you found the answers by using the section and page numbers in the Manual.

**Group I Questions:**

**1. Do foster parents have the legal authority to make educational decisions for their foster children under special education law?**

*Chapter 4, Sec. 401.3(F)*

It depends. County certified foster parents as well as foster parents with private, nonprofit child placement agencies may be able to exercise legal authority over decisions related to special education, making appointment of an ESP unnecessary, under the following circumstances:

- The parent's authority to make educational decisions on the child's behalf has been terminated under state law, and
- The foster parent:
  - has an ongoing, long-term parental relationship with the child,
  - is willing to make educational decisions under the Act, and
  - has no interest that would conflict with the interests of the child.

**2. What is a manifestation determination?**

*Chapter 5 Sec. 506.7*

This is a determination, in a disciplinary matter, about whether the child's behavior was related to the child's disability. The burden is on the school system to demonstrate that the behavior was not a manifestation of the disability. If the team finds that the behavior is related to the child's disability, the child cannot be punished for the behavior. Direct the group to the questions in Chapter 5, Sec. 506.7 that the IEP Team must answer in order to make this determination.

**Group II Questions:**

**1. What program provides developmental assessments and early intervention services to children ages 0 to 3 with developmental problems?**

*Chapter 6, Sec. 603.1*

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) governs services to children birth to three and its purpose is to intervene as early as possible to address developmental delays that could undermine the development of the skills necessary for success in school. The Part C program in Colorado is called Early Intervention Colorado.

**2. Is parental consent needed to have records transferred from one school to another?**

*Chapter 3, Sec. 302.0*

If the transfer of records is going from one school to another, the child's biological parents do not have to provide consent. To release those records to you as the foster parent, however, would require a signed release from the child's biological parents.

Tell participants that the critical issue of transfer of records will be discussed in greater detail in Module 3.

### Module 3: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Manual Chapter(s)
<p><b>Total:</b> 70 minutes</p> <p><i>Introduction:</i> 15 minutes</p> <p><i>Small groups:</i> 30 minutes</p> <p><i>Report back/Discussion:</i> 25 minutes</p>	<p><b>Module 3:</b> <i>Promoting school stability and daily educational success</i></p> <p>School stability: the impact of changing schools and strategies to avoid this</p> <p>Strategies for easing transitions if children must change schools</p> <p>Sharing information with school personnel/confidentiality</p> <p>Socio-emotional impact of being in child welfare system on children’s educational well being</p> <p>Supporting education in the foster home</p> <p>Attendance at school events, facilitating participation in extra-curricular activities</p> <p>Sensitivity in classroom</p>	<p>Small Group Activity:</p> <p><i>Daniel’s Case</i></p> <p><i>Mary’s Case</i></p> <p>Report back and discussion</p>	<p>Chapters 2 and 3</p>

### **Module 3:**

Approximately 70 minutes

#### **Rationale**

Given that the average length of stay in the child welfare system in Colorado is 20 months, it is critical for foster parents to move quickly in order to support children's educational needs as soon as a child is placed in their home (U.S. House of Representatives, 2004). Foster parents can play an important role in promoting school stability. Whenever possible, the foster parent should work with the caseworker to avoid changes in schools when a school-aged child is placed in a new foster home. If a change in schools is in the best interests of the child, or is unavoidable for other reasons, the focus should shift to how the foster parent can make the transition as smooth as possible for the child.

Once a child is enrolled in school, foster parents can also play a critical role in supporting their daily educational success. The factors that the youth in the DVD, *Speaking Out*, cited as the most important sources of motivation for them to do well in school tended to focus on the individual acts of support and encouragement by the adults in their lives, including foster parents. Examples they mentioned included receiving a small reward for a good grade, the opportunity to learn to play the flute, the chance to be on the track team *and* have someone in the stands to cheer them on. Simple strategies can be used by foster parents to motivate and encourage children and youth to overcome obstacles and do well in school.



## **Learning Objectives**

When this module is complete, participants should be able to:

- Understand the importance of school stability for children in the child welfare system.
- Use strategies to keep a child in his or her home school if a child is placed in a foster home in a different school district.
- Discuss ways to ease the transition for a child who *must* change schools.
- Learn the importance of timely enrollment and transfer of records.
- Learn the importance of ensuring that youth in secondary school receive required (vs. elective) credit for coursework completed in their old school.
- Learn the importance of sharing information with school personnel and what information is appropriate to share – the “need to know” standard.
- Learn simple strategies foster parents can use to make a difference in the child’s educational success on a daily basis.

## **Activities**

- Conduct two small group case scenarios: “Daniel’s Case” and “Mary’s Case” and in the report back/debrief have a large group discussion about:
  - The importance of school stability and the difficulties for children when they have to change schools
  - Strategies to keep the child in his or her home school
  - Ways to ease transitions if a change in schools

cannot be avoided

- Social-emotional issues and the desire for normalcy
- Sensitivity in classroom assignments, school events
- Including foster care in diversity work done in schools
- Supporting education in the foster home
- Supporting participation of foster children in extra- curricular activities
- Participation in parent/teacher conferences
- Attendance at school events

### **Materials Needed**

- ✓ Manuals
- ✓ Flipcharts for each group and one for the report back and markers
- ✓ Small group activity handouts: “Daniel’s Case” and Mary’s Case”

### **Advanced Preparation**

Read Chapters 2 and 3 of the Manual.

Review Appendices E, F, G, J, K, L, Z and AA of the Manual.

Make sure each small group has a flipchart and markers

Set up a flipchart for the large group report-back

### **Trainer’s Instructions**

- Introduce the module by saying the following:  
*Multiple changes in schools can have a negative impact on the social-emotional well being and academic performance of children in foster care.*

*A fact sheet from Casey Family Programs summarizing the research on foster care children includes the following data on the impact of changes in schools (Casey Family Programs, 2007):*

- *A 2004-2005 three state study of youth aging out of care found that over one third of the young adults had had five or more school changes (Courtney et al., 2004).*
- *A 1996 study of students in Chicago Public Schools found that students who had changed schools four or more times had lost approximately one year of educational growth by their sixth year (Kerbow, 1996).*
- *A 1999 study found that California high school students who changed schools even once were less than half as likely to graduate as those who did not change schools, even when controlling for other variables that affect high school completion (Rumberger, et al., 1999).*

*Once a child is enrolled in school, foster parents also play a critical role on a daily basis in promoting the education of foster children. You saw in the DVD what factors seem to make a difference in helping children and youth succeed in school. What the kids mentioned were really the small*

*gestures of support that the adults in their lives made and that they will remember forever. Foster parents play a critical role here: educating school personnel, supporting education at home, attending school events, monitoring progress and encouraging and facilitating participation in extra-curricular activities.*

- The case studies for this module allow participants to focus on the needs of two age groups – elementary school students and high school students. Ask participants to divide into groups based on which age group they are interested in discussing. Have them look at the handouts “Daniel’s Case.” and “Mary’s Case.” Each trainer should facilitate one of the groups.
- Once participants are divided into groups, the trainer/facilitator should read the case study aloud to participants as they follow along, and go over the questions listed on the sheet. Ask for and respond to any questions about the case.
- Ask each group to select a member to write their group’s responses to the case questions on their flipchart.
- Tell participants to use the Manual and their own experiences as a foster parent to answer the questions for the case study. In the report back ask them to indicate the section(s) of the Manual which they found helpful in answering the case study questions.
- Tell them that they have approximately 30 minutes to work on this exercise.
- Once 30 minutes has passed, ask groups to report out

- after first describing the case to the entire group for the benefit of those whose group didn't discuss that case study. There will be some overlap in the issues between the two case studies so to save time, ask the second group that reports out to add anything the first group didn't mention. Take 25 minutes for the report-back.
- Use the Manual to point out any additional strategies or issues not discussed in the Report-back beyond those listed on the Instructor's copies of the case studies. Make sure you direct them to the Agency Letter in Appendix Z which outlines the protections related to school stability, transfer of records and enrollment under the new state law, 22-32-138 C.R.S. Make the following points:
    - Asking the caseworker for information about the educational needs/experiences of the child and reviewing that information to assess the educational status of the child.
    - Importance of school stability and role of foster parent in promoting this. Tell them about the checklist in Appendix AA that can be used as a tool with the caseworker to determine whether it is best for the child to remain in the original school or to change schools.
    - Importance of clarifying with the caseworker who will take care of enrolling the child if a child has to change schools. Then making sure child is enrolled as soon as possible following the timelines laid out in the Agency Letter, Appendix Z.
    - Also, emphasize new protections in state law to

avoid delays in enrollment when documents, such as immunization records, are lacking.

- Making sure all school records are transferred in a timely fashion. Emphasize again that parental consent is not required to transfer records from one school to another. Go over new protections and timelines for transfer of records in 22-32-138 C.R.S.
- For secondary students, timely transfer is especially important so schedules can be made up that minimize the loss of credits earned at the last school. Sitting down with the guidance counselor as soon as possible and going to the principal if issues arise. Again, emphasize new provisions addressing credit issues when students transfer outlined in 22-32-138 C.R.S.
- Sharing contact information with the school so they know who to contact and you know who is responsible for what aspect of the child's education at the school.
- Further discuss issues of confidentiality and the "need to know" standard and direct foster parents to the Manual for more detail on applicable laws including:
  - Family Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA)
  - Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)
  - Colorado Children's Code
  - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Reinforce the critical role of foster parents in

supporting education every day and remind them that strategies for promoting daily educational success should reflect those elements listed in Appendix A of the Manual that have been shown to promote that success.

- Begin to wrap up this module by asking for and responding to any questions, comments or concerns. Remind them that a high percentage of children in the child welfare system drop out of school. Ensuring school stability, timely enrollments and supporting education on a daily basis play a large role in keeping kids in school until graduation. It's important here to emphasize, again, the importance of accepting placements only when you truly feel comfortable so that the placement will be more stable and the child can avoid additional changes in schools.
- Introduce the next module, *What to do if You Have a Concern* by saying,

*Module 3 focused on the steps to take when a child is first placed in your home as well as the ongoing support needed by all children in the child welfare system in order to be successful in school. Module 4 will focus on what to do when a concern arises about a child's performance in school and what continuum of services are available to address the child's needs, including RtI and special education.*

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Kerbow, D. (1996). *Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform*. Technical Report No. 5, October. Washington, D.C. Center for Research on the Education of Children Placed at Risk.

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U.S. House of Representatives, (2004), *2004 Green Book*, Table II-38 Committee on Ways and Means, Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, 2004. URL: <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/Documents.asp?section=813>.



**Small Group Activity:  
Daniel's Case**

Daniel, a second grader, has attended the same elementary school since starting kindergarten. He lives in a foster home a few blocks away from his school. While he has made friends, Daniel has had problems with behavior in the classroom, and these problems become worse after his visitations with his biological mother. He also has difficulty paying attention in class and it has been hard for his teacher to determine if that is a separate issue or whether he is simply distracted by the emotional impact of his family situation.

Late in the fall, Daniel's foster mother becomes ill and tells Daniel's caseworker that she doesn't think she can take care of Daniel anymore. His caseworker decides to wait until after the holidays to tell Daniel that he will have to move to a new foster home.

The children in Daniel's classroom expect to see Daniel when they return from the holiday break but he doesn't appear. Because of concerns about confidentiality, Daniel's teacher feels she can't explain to the children why Daniel isn't there so she just tells them that he has moved away. Johnny, Daniel's best friend, looks bewildered and says, "But I walked by his house yesterday – they haven't moved! And anyway, he wouldn't move away without even saying goodbye to me!" All Daniel's teacher can think to say is "I'm sorry, Johnny. I know you're feeling sad."

Your foster home is in a school district bordering the district where Daniel's old school is located. You work part-time and take care of two foster children but you agree to have Daniel placed in your home. Daniel is told by his caseworker that he may have to change schools because of the change in placement.

Using the Manual and your own experience as a foster parent, answer the following questions as a group:

1. Remembering times when you changed schools or had a new student in your class as a child, what did parents, teachers and others do to help with the transition and ease any anxieties? How do you think that differs for children in the child welfare system?
2. Working with the caseworker, how would you determine if it was in Daniel's best interests to stay in his old school or to change schools? If he should stay, what are some strategies you can use to avoid Daniel having to go to a new school? What issues might need to be addressed to make that happen?

3. If changes can't be avoided or it has been determined that it is in Dan's best interests to attend a new school, what could you do, as Daniel's new foster parent, to help ease the transition for Daniel?
4. What information would you be able to tell staff at the new school about Daniel's situation? How could you explain some of the challenges Daniel presents in a way that wouldn't give his teachers a negative impression of him?
5. Once Daniel is enrolled in school, share some strategies you could use to support his education at home, monitor his progress, communicate with his teachers and provide encouragement on a daily basis.

**Small Group Activity:  
Daniel's Case**

Daniel, a second grader, has attended the same elementary school since starting kindergarten. He lives in a foster home a few blocks away from his school. While he has made friends, Daniel has had problems with behavior in the classroom, and these problems become worse after his visitations with his biological mother. He also has difficulty paying attention in class and it has been hard for his teacher to determine if that is a separate issue or whether he is simply distracted by the emotional impact of his family situation.

Late in the fall, Daniel's foster mother becomes ill and tells Daniel's caseworker that she doesn't think she can take care of Daniel anymore. His caseworker decides to wait until after the holidays to tell Daniel that he will have to move to a new foster home.

The children in Daniel's classroom expect to see Daniel when they return from the holiday break but he doesn't appear. Because of concerns about confidentiality, Daniel's teacher feels she can't explain to the children why Daniel isn't there so she just tells them that he has moved away. Johnny, Daniel's best friend, looks bewildered and says, "But I walked by his house yesterday – they haven't moved! And anyway, he wouldn't move away without even saying goodbye to me!" All Daniel's teacher can think to say is "I'm sorry, Johnny. I know you're feeling sad."

Your foster home is in a school district bordering the district where Daniel's old school is located. You work part-time and take care of two foster children but you agree to have Daniel placed in your home. Daniel is told by his caseworker that he may have to change schools because of the change in placement.

Using the Manual and your own experience as a foster parent, answer the following questions as a group:

1. Remembering times when you changed schools or had a new student in your class as a child, what did parents, teachers and others do to help with the transition and ease any anxieties? How do you think that differs for children in the child welfare system?
  - The impact on Daniel's social-emotional well being of changing schools and how that would feel if it happened a number of times during the child's school career.
  - Talk about the bewilderment of Johnny and the other kids and what Daniel's teacher could or couldn't say to explain what happened.

2. Working with the caseworker, how would you determine if it was in Daniel's best interests to stay in his old school or to change schools? If he should stay, what are some strategies you can use to avoid Daniel having to go to a new school? What issues might need to be addressed to make that happen?

- Go over the potential issues involved in trying to keep Daniel in his old school. Steps to take to determine with the caseworker if that is in his best interest, including consulting with Daniel to see what he wants. Direct participants to the checklist tool in Appendix AA to help with this decision. Refer to provisions in Fostering Connections and in 22-32-138 C.R.S. that require caseworkers to address school stability and that provide new funding to cover "reasonable costs" of transportation to the child's original school.
- Talk about situations in which it may not be in the best interests of a child to stay in the same school: e.g. safety issues, wanting to make a fresh start, etc.
- If it is in his best interests, how the foster parent might be able to get help with transporting the child to the old school, at least until the school year is over. Also, what could be done if the children in the new foster home go to different schools with the same start time? Will there be a need for before or after school care?

3. If changes can't be avoided or it has been determined that it is in Dan's best interests to attend a new school, what could you do, as Daniel's new foster parent, to help ease the transition for Daniel?

- Discuss what to do if a child must change schools using the list of steps to take to ease transitions in Appendix J of the Manual. Changing schools is traumatic for all kids but the trauma is eased by the steps parents typically take to meet with the teacher to inform them about the child, take the child on a tour of the school and meet teachers before school starts. Ask foster parents what they've done to help kids transition to a new school, including taking the child back to their old school so they can say goodbye.
- Go over the provisions in 22-32-138 C.R.S. which provide for timely transfer of records and enrollment and protect children and youth from delays in enrollment because of a lack of documents, including immunization records. Direct participants to the agency letter in Appendix Z implementing this new state law.

- Explain that under one of the exceptions to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), parental consent is *not* required for one school to transfer records to another school!

4. What information would you be able to tell staff at the new school about Daniel's situation? How could you explain some of the challenges Daniel presents in a way that wouldn't give his teachers a negative impression of him?

- Confidentiality issues related to what can be shared with the school about the child. Also, the importance of using "soft language" to describe a child's potential behavior or difficulties in school. Avoid inflammatory words like "defiant". Instead, try to use more positive, "strengths-based" language and talk about potential problems from the child's point of view – why the child might do some of these things – e.g. he or she is upset about a visitation, he or she thinks that's how to make friends or impress the other kids, he or she can be overwhelmed in very noisy, crowded situations.

5. Once Daniel is enrolled in school, share some strategies you could use to support his education at home, monitor his progress, communicate with his teachers and provide encouragement on a daily basis.

- In discussing the strategies for supporting education once Daniel is enrolled and back in school, say that there are no right or wrong answers here. Direct them to the following chapters of the Manual and Appendices which may provide helpful information for this exercise:
  - Chapter 1
  - Chapter 3 Sections 303.0 to 303.5
  - Chapter 6 Section 604.0
  - Chapter 7 Section 701.0;
  - Appendices: T, U, V, W, X, Z and AA.
- Impress on them that as foster parents, they are responsible for saying what needs to be said and asking the questions that need to be asked, in short for being the child's advocate with the school. They are the 24/7 adult caring for the child and they should feel empowered to be the advocate.

**Small Group Activity  
Mary's Case**

On Thursday afternoon in Mrs. Callahan's 10th grade American History class, students are working in pairs on their Bill of Rights projects. Mary, a young girl in foster care, and her best friend, Lynette, have chosen to do their report on Freedom of Speech. They recently became friends after Mary moved to town three months ago. Mary has made a good adjustment to school but is exhibiting difficulties in staying organized and getting her homework done on time. She is also very distractible in class and often daydreams.

Mrs. Jones, the high school principal, walks into the classroom and speaks briefly with Mrs. Callahan— then asks Mary to come with her. Mary feels her face flush with embarrassment as her classmates suddenly become quiet and watch her walk to the door. She finds out when she gets to the principal's office that her caseworker is there because there is a problem with her foster home and she will need to leave. She has to be placed in another foster home right away. She is also told that this means she may have to change schools. Mary leaves with her caseworker. Lynette wonders what happened to Mary but Mrs. Callahan feels she can't explain because of confidentiality.

After two weeks in a temporary placement, during which Mary does not attend school, Mary is placed in your foster home which is in an adjoining school district to the one where Mary had been going.

Use the Manual and your own experience as foster parents to discuss the following questions in your group:

1. Remembering times when you changed schools or had a new student in your class as a child, what did parents, teachers and others do to help with the transition and ease any anxieties? How do you think that differs for children in the child welfare system?
2. Working with the caseworker, how would you determine if it was in Mary's best interests to stay in her old school or change schools? If she should stay, what are some strategies you can use to avoid Mary having to go to a new school? What issues might need to be addressed to make that happen?

3. If changes can't be avoided or it has been determined that it is in Mary's best interests to attend a new school, what could you do, as Mary's new foster parent, to help ease the transition for Mary?
4. What information would you be able to tell staff at the new school about Mary's situation? How could you explain some of the challenges Mary presents in a way that wouldn't give her teachers a negative impression of her?
5. How could you help ensure that Mary didn't fall behind in the credits she needs for graduation because of having to change schools?
6. Once Mary is enrolled in school, share some strategies you could use to support her education at home, monitor her progress, communicate with her teachers and provide encouragement on a daily basis.

**Small Group Activity:  
Mary's Case**

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After two weeks in a temporary placement, during which Mary does not attend school, Mary is placed in your foster home which is in an adjoining school district to the one where Mary had been going.

Use the Manual and your own experience as foster parents to discuss the following questions in your group:

1. Remembering times when you changed schools or had a new student in your class as a child, what did parents, teachers and others do to help with the transition and ease any anxieties? How do you think that differs for children in the child welfare system?
  - The impact on Mary's social-emotional well being of changing schools and how that would feel if it happened a number of times during the child's school career.
  - The bewilderment of the other kids and the messages it sends to them about kids in foster care – why get to know them if they will just move on?
2. Working with the caseworker, how would you determine if it was in Mary's best interests to stay in her old school or change schools? If she should stay, what are



some strategies you can use to avoid Mary having to go to a new school? What issues might need to be addressed to make that happen?

- Go over the potential issues involved in trying to keep Mary in her old school. Steps to take to determine with the caseworker if that is in her best interest, including consulting with Mary to see what she wants. Direct participants to the checklist tool in Appendix AA to help with this decision. Also refer to provisions in *Fostering Connections* and in 22-32-138 C.R.S. that require caseworkers to address school stability and provide funding to cover the “reasonable cost” of transportation to the child’s old school.
  - Situations in which it may not be in the best interests of a child to stay in the same school: e.g. safety issues, wanting to make a fresh start, a desire to get away from a gang.
  - If it is in her best interests, how the foster parent might be able to get help with transporting the child to the old school, at least until the school year is over.
3. If changes can’t be avoided or it has been determined that it is in Mary’s best interests to attend a new school, what could you do, as Mary’s new foster parent, to help ease the transition for Mary?
- Discuss what to do if a child must change schools using the list of steps to take to ease transitions in Appendix J of the Manual. Changing schools is traumatic for all kids but the trauma is eased by the steps parents typically take to meet with the teacher to inform them about the child, take the child on a tour of the school and meet teachers before school starts. Ask foster parents what they’ve done to help kids transition to a new school, including taking the child back to their old school so they can say goodbye.
  - Go over the provisions in 22-32-138 C.R.S. which provide for timely transfer of records and enrollment and protect children and youth from delays in enrollment because of a lack of documents, including immunization records. Direct them to the Agency Letter in Appendix Z implementing this new state law.
  - Explain that under one of the exceptions to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), parental consent is *not* required for one school to transfer records to another school!
4. What information would you be able to tell staff at the new school about Mary’s situation? How could you explain some of the challenges Mary presents in a way that wouldn’t give her teachers a negative impression of her?

- Confidentiality issues related to what can be shared with the school about the child. Also, the importance of using “soft language” to describe a child’s potential behavior or difficulties in school. Avoid inflammatory words like “defiant”. Instead, try to use more positive, “strengths-based” language and talk about potential problems from the child’s point of view – why the child might do some of these things –e.g. he or she is upset about a visitation, he or she thinks that’s how to make friends or impress the other kids, he or she can be overwhelmed in very noisy, crowded situations.
5. How could you help ensure that Mary didn’t fall behind in the credits she needs for graduation because of having to change schools?
- Stress the importance of contacting the guidance counselor and requesting a review of the child’s transcript to make sure Mary doesn’t lose credits for courses completed. Review provisions in 22-32-138 C.R.S. about requirements related to the sending and receiving schools and the certification and awarding of credits when students in the child welfare system change schools.
6. Once Mary is enrolled in school, share some strategies you could use to support her education at home, monitor her progress, communicate with her teachers and provide encouragement on a daily basis.
- In discussing the strategies for supporting education once Mary is enrolled and back in school, say that there are no right or wrong answers here. Direct them to the following chapters of the Manual and Appendices which may provide helpful information for this exercise:
    - Chapter 1
    - Chapter 3 Sections 303.0 to 303.5
    - Chapter 6 Section 604.0
    - Chapter 7 Section 701.0;
    - Appendices: T, U, W, X, Z and AA.
  - Impress on them that as foster parents, they are responsible for saying what needs to be said, for being the child’s advocate with the school. They are the 24/7 adults caring for the child and they should feel empowered to be the advocate.

## Module 4: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Pages in Manual
<p><b>Total:</b> 90 min.</p> <p><i>Introduction:</i> 10 min.</p> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i> 30 min.</p> <p><i>Large group debrief:</i> 20 min.</p> <p><i>Discussion of basic principles of RtI and special education:</i> 30 min.</p>	<p><b>Module 4:</b> <i>What to do if You Have a Concern</i></p> <p>Continuum of steps to take if foster parents have a concern – from talking to classroom teachers to RtI and special education</p> <p>Understanding basic principles of special education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAPE</li> <li>• RtI</li> <li>• Special education referral process</li> <li>• Eligibility for special education/ Section 504</li> <li>• Least restrictive environment</li> <li>• Educational surrogates</li> <li>• Due Process rights</li> </ul>	<p>Small Group Activity: <i>Michael's Case</i></p> <p>Debrief/discussion</p> <p>Overview of RtI and special education</p> <p>Wrap-up</p>	<p>Chapters 4, 5 and 6</p>

## **Module 4: What to do if You Have a Concern**

### **Time**

Approximately 90 minutes

### **Rationale**

Many children in the child welfare system have had multiple changes in schools, have special needs and have fallen behind their peers academically. Therefore, it is likely that foster parents may have a child placed with them who is struggling academically. It is important for foster parents to be alert to the difficulties their foster children may be having and to know what to do if they have a concern that the child's educational needs are not being met.

Sometimes a child's difficulties are serious enough to warrant immediate referral to special education. For others, some creative problem-solving with teachers to come up with simple classroom modifications can address the problem. However, too often, because foster children are less likely to stay in the same school district throughout their school careers, concerns about academic performance are overlooked. Foster parents are the adults in a foster child's life who are in regular communication with school personnel and can make sure that doesn't happen. It is important for foster parents to be able to ask basic questions of education specialists to determine if minor adjustments can be made to help a child who is having difficulty, or whether additional interventions or a referral for special education is warranted. The new RTI process in Colorado will help foster parents in understanding and navigating this continuum of interventions.

Children with academic difficulties need ongoing advocacy to

make sure they receive appropriate supports, to monitor progress and initiate action if the interventions are not having the intended impact.

### **Learning Objectives**

When this module is completed, participants should be able to:

- Learn the steps to take if it is suspected that a child has academic or behavioral problems.
- Be familiar with the Response to Intervention (RtI) process.
- Understand the key principles of special education law.
- Understand the rules regarding educational surrogates.
- Understand the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and the foster parent's role in it.
- Understand the procedures schools must follow when a child in special education becomes the subject of a disciplinary action.

### **Activities**

- Small group discussion of "Michael's Case".
- Report back to larger group
- Large group brief discussion about the basic principles of RtI and special education and to elicit suggestions from the group for what foster parents should do when they have a concern about a student's performance in school and what their role should be in an IEP meeting.

### **Materials Needed**

- ✓ Manuals
- ✓ Small group discussion of "Michael's Case"
- ✓ Flipchart and markers

## **Advanced Preparation**

Read Section 303.5 of Chapter 3, all of Chapter 4 and Sections 506.0 to 506.12 of Chapter 5 of the Manual.

Review Appendices H, I, M, N, O, P, Q, R and S of the Manual.

Set up a flipchart for the large group debrief.

## **Trainer's Instructions**

- Introduce the module by presenting the rationale and learning objectives.
- Ask participants to look at the handout, “Michael’s Case” in their packets.
- Read aloud to participants as they follow along, and go over the questions listed on the sheet. Ask for and respond to any questions about the case.
- Ask small groups to select a member to write their group’s responses to the case questions on their flipchart.
- Tell participants to use the Manual to answer the questions for the case study and to report back on the section of the Manual where they found the information.
- Tell them that they have approximately 30 minutes to work on this exercise.
- Once 30 minutes has passed, ask groups to report out. To save time, ask groups to volunteer to go first and once the first group reports back ask if the other groups came up with anything different that they would like to add to the discussion.
- Debrief for about 20 minutes about the main points they raised in their small group discussion.
- Take the next 30 minutes to provide an overview of the following topics using the information in the Manual and,

where appropriate, using examples from Michael's Case to illustrate these points.

- Addressing concerns *before* referring to special education
- RtI process explaining that this is a new system whose purpose is to intervene early to address *all* children's individual educational and behavioral needs along a continuum of intensity using the chart in Appendix P of the Manual to illustrate that continuum. Ultimately, it is designed to insure that *all* children are monitored closely and receive the individualized attention they need with the hope that this will address potential difficulties early and reduce the number of children who are ultimately referred to special education.
- Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)
- The process/timeline for referring a child for an evaluation for special education, including who can refer, how this is coordinated with RtI and the timelines schools must follow under IDEA 2004.
- Two-pronged test for eligibility for special education and eligibility for Section 504
- Least restrictive environment
- The IEP process
- Educational surrogates, particularly emphasizing the circumstances under which foster parents may exercise authority to make educational decisions for a child in special education
- Discuss the role of the foster parent when he or she is given legal authority over educational decision-making but also the important role they play even

when the biological parent retains that legal decision-making. The foster parent is with the child when the child is out of school, and therefore is a critical source of information and an important advocate for asking the right questions and explaining the needs of the child to school staff.

- Procedural safeguards under IDEA
- Special protections for students in special education in disciplinary actions
- Make sure you allow enough time in the overview for questions and reassure them by acknowledging that the topics covered in this module can be a little overwhelming. It helps to direct participants to where in the Manual they can find more detailed information.
- Sum up by asking the group the following questions to reinforce what was learned:
  - If you have a concern about a child's performance in school, who should you call?
  - How does the RtI process work and how does it relate to special education?
  - What steps can you take short of referring a child to special education?
  - Who can refer a child to special education?
  - What is your role in an IEP meeting?
  - For children in special education, what do you do if you have a concern that an IEP is not being implemented correctly or you think that additional services may be needed?
  - In the IEP process, can a caseworker sign or give consent as the parent?
  - If you get a call about a disciplinary action against a



child who is in special education, what should you do? What questions should you ask? Of whom?

- Introduce the next module, *Special Populations*, by telling participants that in Module 5 we will focus on the special issues involved in addressing the educational issues of the youngest and oldest children in the child welfare system.

**Small Group Activity  
Michael's Case**

Michael is an eight year old boy who was placed in your home six months ago. He had to go to a new school as a result of his placement. Michael is in third grade and you have noticed that he has difficulty reading the books assigned to him and he tells you that he hates school. He gives up easily when trying to read his homework assignments. He is not in special education.

You receive a call from Michael's classroom teacher that he is acting out in class. He is disrupting class discussions, getting easily frustrated and picking arguments with the other children. He seems to daydream when the teacher is giving instructions. He has also had a number of disciplinary problems during certain times of the day like lunch and recess.

This doesn't sound like the boy you know at home. Except for his frustration over reading, he has not exhibited any of these behaviors in your home.

1. What questions would you want to ask the teacher about Michael's difficulties?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Discuss what steps you might take to help Michael. What could you do to help Michael at home?

Small Group Activity:  
Michael's Case

Michael is an eight year old boy who was placed in your home six months ago. He had to go to a new school as a result of his placement. Michael is in third grade, and you have noticed that he has difficulty reading the books assigned to him, and he tells you that he hates school. He gives up easily when trying to read his homework assignments. He is not in special education.

You receive a call from Michael's classroom teacher that he is acting out in class. He is disrupting class discussions, getting easily frustrated and picking arguments with the other children. He seems to daydream when the teacher is giving instructions. He has also had a number of disciplinary problems during certain times of the day like lunchtime and recess.

This doesn't sound like the boy you know at home. Except for his frustration over reading, he has not exhibited any of these behaviors in your home.

**For the Report-Back:**

1. What questions would you want to ask the teacher about Michael's difficulties?

Make sure the following are mentioned in the report back and if not, mention them yourself.

(Note: Some of these questions are taken from the list in Appendix I of the Manual)

- Have you had any concerns about Michael's reading or other academic skills? How do his skills compare to other children in his grade?
- Has he had any standardized tests in reading and if so, what were the results?
- In your opinion, to what extent do you think Michael's "acting out" is due to frustrations over reading?
- What do you make of Michael's particular difficulties at certain times of the day such as lunch or recess?
- When you give instructions, particularly ones involving a lot of steps, does Michael seem to understand them? Does he remember them well enough to follow them?
- Does it seem like the curriculum you are covering is different from what Michael has already had? If so, in what ways?
- Are there any supports or services Michael is not receiving that you think would help?
- How do you think Michael has adjusted to his new school?
- How do the other children act towards him?
- Are they aware that he is in foster care?
- Has he ever been bullied or teased by the other children?
- How would you describe the child in terms of his confidence and self esteem? Do you have any other concerns about Michael that haven't come up in our conversation?

2. Discuss what steps you might take to help Michael. What could you do to help Michael at home?
- Depending on what is learned from talking to the classroom teacher emphasize that there is a continuum of steps foster parents can take to get their foster child the help he or she needs. This is where you should go over:
    - Requests they can make of the classroom teacher (See Appendix Q, *Classroom Accommodations Checklist* for modifications that could be requested)
    - RtI process and how it could be used to help Michael. Make sure you mention both the behavioral and academic aspects of this approach. Show them the visual of RtI in Appendix P.
    - Referral to special education. Cover the following:
      - Explain who can refer under IDEA 2004 (See Chapter 4, Sec. 401.4 (A).)
      - It is important to outline your concerns using specifics so the school knows the right evaluations to give to Michael to determine eligibility. For example, point to the fact that he has issues particularly during lunch and recess which might indicate sensory integration problems or his difficulties with following multi-step directions (if that is what the teacher reports) which might indicate a language processing problem
      - Foster parents don't need to try to diagnose the child or figure out exactly what is wrong – only be an effective informant about what they have noticed about the child's functioning.
      - Once a child is referred and found eligible for special education, explain what an IEP is and show participants a sample of one, if available. Emphasize that they are key participants in IEP meetings and refer them to Appendix S: *How Parents Can Participate Effectively in IEP Meetings*.
    - Talk about supports Michael may need outside of school including help with homework (See Appendix X in the Manual) and tutoring (See Chapter 3, Sec 303.1 and Appendix Y for a list of sources of tutoring)

## Module 5: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Chapter(s) in Manual
<p><b>Total:</b> 60 min.</p> <p><i>Introduction:</i> 15 min.</p> <p><i>Small group activity:</i> 20 min.</p> <p><i>Report back/Discussion:</i> 25 min.</p>	<p><b>Module 5:</b> <i>Special Populations</i></p> <p><b>Children 0 to 5:</b></p> <p>Importance of early intervention/early learning environments</p> <p>Referrals for early intervention services</p> <p><b>High School Students:</b></p> <p>Credits/academic challenges</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>Importance of/obstacles to participation in extracurricular activities</p> <p>Who to involve in planning Chafee services</p> <p>Planning for after graduation</p> <p>Resources available to youth transitioning out of child welfare system</p>	<p>Small group activity: <i>Jaclyn's Case</i> and <i>Kim's Case</i>.</p> <p>Report back and discussion</p>	<p>Chapters 6 and 7</p>

## **Module 5: Special Populations**

### **Time**

Approximately 60 minutes

### **Rationale**

Often the educational needs of the youngest and oldest children in the child welfare system fall through the cracks. It is important for foster parents to understand that education, and their role in promoting it, does not begin when a child is five, but rather in infancy. Foster parents need the tools with which to promote the development of the physical, emotional and cognitive skills children need to do well when they reach school age. Foster parents also need to be aware of the importance of early care and education programs and early interventions for very young children in the child welfare system.

The oldest children in the system—particularly those beginning to transition out—have particular needs in the high school setting and require guidance to help them with their options once they have graduated from high school and are independent. Foster parents should be aware of the supports needed by youth at this age and the resources available to high school students to assist them in the decision-making process and the pursuit of post-secondary education and training.

### **Learning Objectives**

When this module is complete, participants should be able to:

- Understand that for all children, education doesn't begin in kindergarten, but at birth.
- Understand what to do if there is a concern about a child's

development.

- Discuss the needs of, and options and resources available to older youth transitioning out of the child welfare system.

### **Activities**

- Conduct small group activity for participants to discuss the key issues of either very young children or those transitioning out of the child welfare system.
- Discuss the key issues from the small group activity as a larger group and add any additional information to the report back as described in the Manual.

### **Materials Needed**

- ✓ Manuals
- ✓ Flipcharts for each group and one for the report back and markers
- ✓ Small group activity sheets: “Jaclyn’s Case” and “Kim’s Case”

### **Advanced Preparation**

Read Chapters 6 and 7 of the Manual.

Make sure each small group has a flipchart and markers.

Set up a flipchart for the large group report-back.

### **Trainer’s Instructions**

- Introduce the module by presenting the rationale and learning objectives.
- Explain that participants will be divided into two groups, one focusing on the needs of younger children ages 0 to 5

and the other focusing on high school-aged youth in the child welfare system. Allow participants to choose which group they want to be in based on their interests/needs. Groups will probably not be split evenly in numbers which is fine. However, if there aren't enough participants in one of the groups to be able to do the activity, you may need to ask if anyone in the other group would agree to switch.

- Explain to the participants that each group will be given a fact situation about a child within their group's assigned age range. Each group should come up with strategies they could use to address the child's needs, in addition to what support they need from caseworkers, teachers, and school staff. Request that they cite the sections of the Manual or Appendices where they found information on these topics. Ask groups to select a member to record their group's key points, with references to the Manual/Appendices, on a flipchart. Groups will have 20 minutes for the task.
- After 20 minutes are up, bring groups together to discuss their process. Ask each group to describe their scenario and report back on what their group discussed as strategies. Allow participants to ask each other questions and offer suggestions. Sum up what the groups shared and discuss the following topics if they were not brought up by the groups.

**Kids 0 to 5:**

- Importance of prenatal care, good nutrition and smoking cessation.
- educational continuum (education doesn't start at age five)
- importance of early learning environments for all children in the child welfare system whether or not there are signs of developmental problems.
- importance of activities at home such as reading

Use the detailed information in Chapter 6 of the Manual to cover these topics.



to children and talking about the things the child is experiencing to develop language. Direct them to the Resource List in Appendix Y for sources of information for enhancing children's development.

- the importance of requirements in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and IDEA 2004 for counties to develop policies and procedures for referring children 0 to 3 who are involved in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect to Part C for screening. Also mention the new Colorado law 26-5-108 C.R.S. that expands that requirement to include children 0 to 5. Direct the participants to the Agency Letter in Appendix BB.
- importance of early care and education settings as well as early intervention/preschool special ed. in promoting school readiness

**Older Kids:**

- credits/academic challenges
  - Chafee services
  - Provisions in IDEA 2004, *Fostering Connections* and 22-32-138 C.R.S. related to certification of coursework when youth change schools and to transition planning
  - mentoring, importance of/obstacles to participation in extracurricular activities
  - planning for after graduation
- Begin to wrap up this module by asking for and responding to any questions, comments or concerns.
  - Introduce the next and final Module 6, *Wrap-up*.

Use the detailed information in Chapter 7 of the Manual to cover these topics.

**Small Group Activity:  
Jaclyn's Case**

*(Children 0 to 5)*

Jaclyn is a two and a half year old girl who has been placed in your foster home after being removed from her biological home for child abuse and neglect.

Jaclyn has been with you for a little over two months. You have observed that Jaclyn is quite withdrawn and spends most of her time holding a teddy bear she brought with her and sucking her thumb. You have also noticed that Jaclyn has trouble understanding anything beyond very simple one step directions and that she seems reluctant to express what she needs to you. When you took Jaclyn to the clinic for a checkup, the doctor told you that it was likely that Jaclyn was just by nature a shy child and that she will probably outgrow her language problems and her withdrawal in your good care. He advised you to just wait and see.

You have two other young children in your care and because Jaclyn is so quiet, you find her very easy to care for compared to the other, more boisterous children in your home. Still something tells you things aren't quite right with Jaclyn. You've been told by Jaclyn's caseworker that in her biological home, the child had little opportunity to leave the house and be with other children. You want to help Jaclyn by doing some things at home that would help draw her out and help her learn some of the things your other children already know. The doctor's advice isn't sitting well with you but you're not quite sure what else you should do for Jaclyn.

1. What do you think about the health report from the doctor?
2. What steps would you take to assess Jaclyn's needs?
3. What outside supports could you consider for Jaclyn? How would you go about accessing those supports? Who would you call? What potential barriers would you encounter and how could those be overcome?
4. What could you do at home to help Jaclyn's development?

**Small Group Activity:  
Jaclyn's Case**

*(Children 0 to 5)*

Jaclyn is a three year old girl who has been placed in your foster home after being removed from her biological home for child abuse and neglect.

Jaclyn has been with you for a little over two months. You have observed that Jaclyn is quite withdrawn and spends most of her time holding a teddy bear she brought with her and sucking her thumb. You have also noticed that Jaclyn has trouble understanding anything beyond very simple one step directions and that she seems reluctant to express what she needs to you. When you took Jaclyn to the clinic for a checkup, the doctor told you that it was likely that Jaclyn was just by nature a shy child and that she will probably outgrow her language problems and her withdrawal in your good care. He advised you to just wait and see.

You have two other young children in your care and because Jaclyn is so quiet, you find her very easy to care for compared to the other, more boisterous children in the home. Still something tells you things aren't quite right with Jaclyn. You've been told by Jaclyn's caseworker that in her biological home, the child had little opportunity to leave the house and be with other children. You want to help Jaclyn by doing some things at home that would help draw her out and help her learn some of the things your other children already know. The doctor's advice isn't sitting well with you but you're not quite sure what else you should do for Jaclyn.

**For the Report –Back:**

*Refer participants to Chapter 6 of the Manual*

1. What do you think about the health report from the doctor?
  - Children in the child welfare system often lack continuity of health care. Because of changes in placement, they often see a different medical provider and sometimes their health records aren't available to the new doctor. In this fact situation, the doctor has never seen the child before. Therefore, he may be more conservative in making recommendations.
  - Doctors sometimes attribute any developmental problems entirely to the adjustment the child is making to being removed from her home which may or may not be the case. Given the importance of early intervention, foster parents may need to be cautious about following a "wait and see" recommendation and pursue a referral if they are really concerned about the child.

2. What steps would you take to assess Jaclyn's needs?
  - Refer participants to Appendices M, N, O, BB.
  - Make sure they talk about how they assess that there is enough of a concern to warrant a referral using the materials on developmental milestones in the Appendices to do an initial assessment of where Jaclyn is developmentally.
  
3. What supports could you consider for Jaclyn? How would you go about accessing those supports? Who would you call? What potential barriers would you encounter and how could those be overcome?
  - Jaclyn may need a referral to obtain a developmental assessment. Mention the requirements under CAPTA and IDEA 2004 for counties to develop policies and procedures for referring to Part C of IDEA children ages 0 to 3 and how that is being implemented at the local level. In Colorado the Part C program is called Early Intervention Colorado. Tell them that a new state law expands that requirement to children ages 0 to 5. According to Agency Letter CW-09-05-1 (included as Appendix BB), counties can refer all children ages 0 through 2 directly to the local Community Centered Board which can be contacted through Early Intervention Colorado. Children 3 to 5 can be referred directly to Child Find through their local school district or a Medicaid provider for a screening under the Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment Program. Counties can also choose to train staff in using a standard developmental screening tool such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to meet the screening requirement. Tell foster parents to ask their caseworker how this new requirement is being implemented in their county. All children must be referred within 60 days of the date on which the charge of abuse or neglect was substantiated. Direct participants to Resource List, Appendix Y for a link to these sources for referrals.
  - Remind participants also that children need *ongoing* monitoring of their development even if they receive that initial assessment because some developmental problems don't become evident until later.
  - Jaclyn had very little opportunity for socialization in her biological home. Given how withdrawn she is, and in light of her language delays, the foster parent may want to try to get her into a preschool or Head Start Program.
  - Discuss potential funding/transportation barriers to enrollment. Be sure to discuss the possibility of waiting lists at a preschool or Head Start Program and what to do in that case. Head Start programs in Colorado place children in foster care at the top of their waiting lists – foster parents just need to ask!
  
4. What can you do at home to help Jaclyn's development?
  - Discuss the importance of school readiness and what is meant by that term using the information in Chapter 6 of the Manual.

- Talk about the importance of talking with Jaclyn and describing the activities they are doing together. As an example, talk about how shopping at the grocery store can be used as a way to help Jaclyn develop her language skills.
- Emphasize the importance of reading to her and asking her questions about the book as you do.
- Direct participants to the Resource listings in the Appendix Y for links to useful web sites for more information.

**Small Group Activity:  
Kim's Case**

*(Transitioning Out)*

Kim is a sixteen year girl who has been in your foster home for three months. She is in her sophomore year in high school, is well-liked by her peers and has told you she is thinking about joining the soccer team and the band.

Although her grade point average is not high, her teachers consistently praise Kim's participation in class and her creative thinking. She is clearly an intelligent young woman, but her grades don't necessarily reflect that; Kim is underperforming. No one in Kim's biological family has attended college. Further, Kim is concerned that she will not be able to afford college or gain acceptance into a good post-secondary program because of her low G.P.A and lack of funds.

At home, Kim can sometimes be difficult. She has received therapy to resolve issues related to her early childhood with her biological parents. But she remains very angry about what has happened to her. You have been asked by the caseworker to give Kim a very structured setting at home with a daily list of chores she must do.

You have felt conflicted about this because there is only so much time after school and you see Kim's intelligence and potential for doing well in school. You don't know what you should do and how to set priorities. The other day, Kim came home with a 100 on her math test but she hadn't made her bed, she'd forgotten to take out the garbage and her room was a mess. You weren't sure whether you should just praise her for her good grade and leave it at that or spoil the praise by focusing on the fact that she didn't do her chores. You feel particularly badly about focusing on any shortcomings just now. At the last parent/teacher conference, Kim felt badly because your biological daughter got a much better report card than she did. And then there are the after school activities she would like to pursue. Won't that just cut into her time even more? How would you get her to the games? How can you afford to buy the soccer cleats, the rental fees for her band instrument and the other costs of participating in these activities?

In the long run, you think Kim needs more encouragement and help thinking about her future but you don't know how to go about making that happen. You're worried that her guidance counselor is making a lot of assumptions that because Kim is in foster care she has fewer opportunities than other kids. Is that true? How could you find out what resources are available?

1. What might be behind Kim's underperforming, and what suggestions could you give Kim about her post-secondary future?

2. How might you set priorities for Kim in a way that would boost her self esteem and promote her making a good effort in school? Is there some way you could use her good grade to help with compliance with her daily chores?
3. What can you do to avoid Kim comparing herself with your biological daughter?
4. How important is it for her to participate in extra-curricular activities? How can you address the barriers to her participation?
5. What resources are available for foster youth to get a higher education? How do you access those resources? How can you help school personnel to raise their expectations for Kim and provide the encouragement she needs?

**Small Group Activity:  
Kim's Case**

*(Transitioning Out)*

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In the long run, you think Kim needs more encouragement and help thinking about her future but you don't know how to go about making that happen? Besides yourself, who else should you involve and how? You're worried that her guidance counselor is making a lot of assumptions that because Kim is in foster care she has fewer opportunities than other kids. Is that true? How could you find out what resources are available?



## For the Report-Back:

1. What might be behind Kim's underperforming, and what suggestions could you give Kim about her post-secondary future?
  - You might ask her teachers if they can provide her with some extra help or some classroom modifications that might help Kim bring her GPA up. (See Appendix Q for a list of classroom accommodations.) High school teachers have many students but if they know there is someone looking out for a child, they are more likely to make her needs a priority.
  - If Kim's teacher reports that Kim isn't understanding some of the materials, you might try first asking Kim's caseworker and the school about any available tutoring services Kim could use.
  - There may be some mental health issues that are getting in the way of Kim performing to her potential. Or there may be a learning problem; Kim may have been able to use her intelligence to compensate for this but may now be having trouble as the work becomes more difficult. Discuss use of the RtI process to get Kim the help she needs.
  - It's also possible that because Kim is so bright that she is bored by the classes she is in. Because of stereotyping about foster children and a tendency toward low expectations, no one may have considered her for honors or AP classes and the additional challenges of those classes may be just what she needs to become more motivated.
  - Perhaps opportunities to job shadow would provide Kim with more of a sense of connection between her education and her future in the workplace and this might in turn motivate her more.
  - Kim needs to be encouraged to pursue post secondary education and informed that there are special resources to help pay for that through the Chafee Act. Explain too that while it's important for her to try to improve her GPA, even if she is not able to boost her grades, the requirements for admission to community colleges are less rigorous.
  - Kim may need a mentor from a mentoring program to provide her with some one-on-one encouragement.
  - Perhaps a volunteer opportunity might help boost Kim's self esteem and generate interest in a particular field.
  - Organize visits to campuses of colleges/post secondary schools.
  
2. How might you set priorities for Kim in a way that would boost her self esteem and promote her making a good effort in school? Is there some way you could use her good grade to help with compliance with her daily chores?
  - If the group doesn't mention this, you might suggest that foster parents not tie the two issues together. Praise for the good grade should be given first. Then later in the evening, the foster parent can raise the issue about doing chores. That way, the child doesn't feel like the praise is spoiled by the remark about the chores.

3. What can you do to avoid Kim comparing herself with your biological daughter?
  - This is a difficult issue that has no right or wrong answer. It's important to emphasize here that foster parents give equal time and attention to their foster child. You can cite the example in the DVD of the youth who said how hurt she was at the parent/teacher conference when her foster mother spent so much less time with her teacher than she did with her biological daughter's teacher.
4. How important is it for her to participate in extra-curricular activities? How can you address the barriers to her participation?
  - Emphasize that the research shows that participation in extra-curricular activities makes a big difference to academic success. Perhaps you and Kim could come up with a plan for her time after school that would be realistic in terms of the number of chores she could do, how she would spend her time on homework and make time for soccer and band practice.
  - Review new provisions in 22-32-138 C.R.S. to waive certain fees to enable children and youth in the child welfare system to participate.
  - Explain that there are sometimes funds available to cover other school-related costs through the child welfare office – suggest that they ask the caseworker.
5. What resources are available for foster youth to get a higher education? How do you access those resources? How can you help school personnel to raise their expectations for Kim and provide the encouragement she needs?
  - Refer to Chapter 7 of the Manual – *Planning for the Future* – for more detailed information on the Chafee Act, Independent Living, the new requirement for emancipation planning under *Fostering Connections* and sources of funding for higher education for kids in foster care. Suggest that they take that information to the school's guidance counselor and ask for help for Kim in setting appropriate expectations, identifying strengths and interests and pursuing this assistance.
  - Explain that in some counties, there is a separate Chafee worker who coordinates Chafee services while in others, the student's regular caseworker does that.
  - People/agencies to involve in planning might be:
    - ✓ High school guidance counselor
    - ✓ Chafee worker
    - ✓ Caseworker
    - ✓ Social worker
    - ✓ Classroom teachers
    - ✓ Orphan Foundation of America
    - ✓ Mentoring program
    - ✓ Child welfare liaison (School districts must designate someone to fill this role under 22-32-138 C.R.S.)

- Inform them about an on-line tool available on the Casey Family Programs website that helps foster youth assess their needs and think through their plans for the future. It's called the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment and can be found at URL: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/>.

## Module 6: Summary

Time	Content	Activities	Chapter(s) in Manual
<p><b>Total:</b> 15 min.</p> <p><i>Wrap-up discussion:</i> 15 min.</p>	<p><b>Module 6:</b> <i>Wrap-up</i></p> <p>Review of themes of the training</p> <p>Plans for applying what's learned to caseworker practice</p>	<p>Wrap-up discussion</p>	

## **Module 6: Wrap-up**

### **Time**

Approximately 15 minutes

### **Rationale**

Participants need time to conclude any unfinished business and reflect on what they have learned over the course of the training.

### **Learning Objectives**

When this module is complete, participants should be able to:

- Discuss the key themes learned throughout the training
- Identify some next steps and ways to apply what was discussed in the training

### **Activities**

- Large group discussion of key themes
- Large group discussion of how participants plan to apply what they learned in the training

### **Materials Needed**

- ✓ Flipchart and markers

### **Advanced Preparation**

Set up a flipchart for the large group discussion.

### **Trainer's Instructions**

- Begin by thanking participants for their participation and hard work throughout the training.
- Ask the group what key points they learned during the training, and record those points on the flipchart for all to

see.

- Ask for volunteers to discuss any points they feel will be especially helpful to their work or any materials they received at the training that they are planning to use right away.
- Discuss any issues on the “Parking Lot” list that have not yet been addressed or give participants some resources to get their questions answered.
- End by acknowledging how challenging it is to take on this educational advocacy role when, as foster parents, they have much on their plates. Yet be sure to cite examples of how addressing educational concerns can stabilize placements – children whose educational and social/emotional needs are met will be easier to care for at home. Repeat the following themes used throughout the training:
  - Remind them again that sometimes the simplest acts can make a huge difference in a child’s life, as they learned in the *Speaking Out* DVD. Underscore the importance of stability for the educational success of children in foster care.
  - Explain how important it is for foster parents to feel comfortable with caring for the child before he or she is placed and to head off crises by addressing problems at school early so they don’t undermine the placement. In other words, “Remember Stability!”
  - Educational success is pivotal to the well-being of children now—and into their adulthood—and foster parents *can* make a difference!