

MY KINSHIP CIRCLE EXERCISE

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Pathways to
Permanence 2

Parenting
Children
Who Have
Experienced
Trauma
AND LOSS

Session 2
Lifelong
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The goal of this exercise is to help participants reconsider how they define kinship, as well as to explore the kinship systems of their children. This will help to provide insight into many of the behavioral and emotional problems of their children, as well as help participants to examine ways they can preserve important connections for their children.

Instructions:

Time: 15-20 minute total

1. Direct participants to Exercise Worksheet, “My Kinship Circle.”
2. Ask participants to list all the individuals to whom they feel an attachment, or a connection, in the circle. Think of this attachment or connection as an “invisible string.” List the individuals by name and role, e.g., John (son), Susan (daughter), for such roles as son, daughter, parent, best friend, spouse, partner, grandparent, roommate, in-laws, cousin, etc.
3. Ask several participants to share who is on their list. Ask several more participants to share roles that appear on their list which have not yet been identified (e.g., if no one has mentioned grandparent, best friend or other important role, make sure those roles are included as part of the discussion).
4. Ask participants to list on their worksheet the reasons that they feel a special connection, kinship bond, attachment to the individuals identified.
5. Ask several participants to share the reasons they wrote. Answers may include: love, shared genetic history, common goals, dependable, support, look alike, shared life experiences, religion/spirituality, sex, etc.
6. Ask participants to select two individuals to cross off their list. Discuss why they selected these two, and how it feels.
7. Ask participants to select two more individuals to cross off their list. Discuss this. Who would they give up in order to gain security? A family? A home?
8. Ask participants to leave only one person on their list. Who would it be?
9. Ask participants what feelings come up as they cross off more and more people. Discuss why this activity is difficult.
10. Ask participants what feelings they may have if they were disconnected or separated from that last person. What if that person was not always meeting all of your needs?
11. Ask participants how they may feel toward the person(s) who caused the separation.
12. Direct participants to “My Child’s Kinship Circle,” which is on the other side of Kinship Circle Exercise Worksheet. Repeat steps 1 – 11 for their children’s kinship circles.
13. Write the individuals that were identified for their children on a flip chart, including their roles (e.g., mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, cousins, foster parents, foster siblings, friends, teachers, social workers, therapists, CASA workers, etc.). Discuss the fact that their children may have been asked to give up people, things and familiarity over and over again as they moved through the child welfare system. Emphasize that their children feel the same things the parents did during this exercise, only more so because for



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the children it is not an exercise but a way of life. Discussion questions for participants to consider:

- How would it feel to be this child?
- What do you think these kinds of relationships have taught the child?
- What do you think this child needs most? (think connections)
- What things can you do to help your child strengthen his/her kinship circle?

14. Close the exercise by asking participants, “What are the key points of this exercise?”

Be sure the following points are made:

- Children who enter foster care and who are placed in adoptive/permanent families actually have this experience in real life – not as a training exercise.
- Children have connections which may not be readily apparent to parents, social workers and others working with the child.
- For every adoptive/permanent family that has its wish come true to adopt a child, another family had to come apart; the same is true for foster parents.
- Our challenge is to create permanency for children in ways that add new connections without subtracting other significant connections. We can never have too many people to protect, nurture and care about us.
- Discuss that their children may have had to give up many people, places, things in order to gain a family.
- Ask what knowledge or thoughts participants acquired from this exercise.

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