



## Working with Kin Caregivers — Unique Considerations

Based on the work of Dr. Joseph Crumbley

### Guilt and Embarrassment

Feelings of guilt that relative caregivers may experience due to changing family dynamics. Kin caregivers may need time to process their feelings of guilt and embarrassment.

#### Guilt and embarrassment may occur when the kin caregiver is:

- ▶ Afraid of contributing to family disruption
- ▶ More committed to meeting the child's needs than the birth parent's
- ▶ Feeling that the child has become more attached to the kin caregiver than the birth parent
- ▶ Demonstrating better parenting of the child than the birth parent
- ▶ Asking for services or assistance (e.g., financial)
- ▶ Having to disclose negative information about the birth parent or family
- ▶ Having to explain to the child why they're living with relatives and not their parents and siblings
- ▶ Having to explain to friends or relatives where the child's parents are

#### Goals and Strategies:

- ▶ Acknowledge feelings and normalize mistakes — accept past behaviors
- ▶ Encourage self-forgiveness
- ▶ Validate growth
- ▶ Remind the caregiver that what they are doing makes a difference
- ▶ Embrace new roles and attachments
- ▶ Educate the caregiver on the system and how to disclose information
- ▶ Provide strategies that have worked for other kin caregivers and brainstorm what may work for their family with the kin caregiver

### Loss and Ambivalence

Kinship care can cause unplanned interruptions of the caregiver's plans, priorities, space and privacy which can lead to feelings of loss and ambivalence. These feelings, if left unaddressed, can present risk factors for the child.

#### Goals and Strategies:

- ▶ Normalize the loss and ambivalence
- ▶ Destigmatize the emotions and hesitations

- ▶ Elicit caregiver's commitment to a process to determine if they are a permanency option
- ▶ Identify tasks, benchmarks, and timeline for determining permanency plan
- ▶ Develop a process for monitoring, identifying, and knowing when an alternative placement plan is necessary
- ▶ Make it safe to disclose and talk about alternative involvement

## Projections and Transference

Projection and transference describe the unconscious processes where we redirect our emotions from one person to another. These are not inherently bad and are common in families, but they can become a risk factor in kinship care if the caregiver does not like the person the child reminds them of.

### Projection and transference of emotions may occur when:

- ▶ A caregiver may see the child and how much that child reminds them of someone in the family which triggers how they feel about that family member
- ▶ There are unresolved issues with the birth parents transferred to the child
- ▶ The kin caregiver has difficulty perceiving the child's personality as different from the birth parent's
- ▶ The kin caregiver does not understand the birth parent's influence on the child's growth and development
- ▶ The child's behavior is misinterpreted as a personal attack

### Goals and Strategies:

- ▶ Acknowledge positives and focus on the strengths of the child and the parent
- ▶ Avoid re-creating "monsters" and "self-fulfilling prophecy"
- ▶ Interrupt cycles by discussing what opportunities are needed in order for the child to be different from their birth parents and the life experiences, opportunities (of lack thereof) that could have impacted why the birth parent is different from the kin caregiver
- ▶ Facilitate the child's positive self-image, individuality and identification with the birth parents
- ▶ Avoid triangulating the child
- ▶ Encourage the kin caregiver to be more accepting of behaviors and to support and influence positive shifts in behavior

## Hope, Fantasy, and Denial

At times, one person's hope can be another person's denial. It can be difficult for relative caregivers to feel like they are giving up on people they love. Hope is critical to empathetically working with families to maintain these hopes and make other plans.

### Goals and Strategies:

- ▶ Normalize the hopes, while preparing for alternative planning
- ▶ Develop alternative plan

- ▶ Not projecting hopes onto the child
- ▶ Implementing safety plans and making the child feel safe and believed

### **Loyalty Issues**

Shared blood, history, memories and interdependence hold families together and create loyalty. Kinship care changes family dynamics and requires shifting roles, responsibilities, authority and loyalties. Relative caregivers need support to adjust to new realities, which may go against deep familiar and cherished norms.

#### **Loyalty issues may occur when the kin caregiver:**

- ▶ Struggles with assuming the role of the parent without hurting or replacing the birth parent
- ▶ Experiences split loyalty to both the birth parent and the child
- ▶ Feels disloyal by placing the child's needs above the birth parents'
- ▶ Has to disclose negative information about the family to others and feels like they are betraying the birth parent

#### **Goals and Strategies:**

- ▶ Prioritizing the child and responsibilities
- ▶ Redefining pre-existing roles and relationships
- ▶ Identifying and planning for "disloyalty triggers"
- ▶ Not infantilize the birth parent

### **REFERENCE**

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Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017, October 24), [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org), highlights from Dr. Crumbley's videos, *Engaging Kinship Caregivers With Joseph Crumbley*, <https://www.aecf.org/blog/engaging-kinship-caregivers-with-joseph-crumbley/>

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