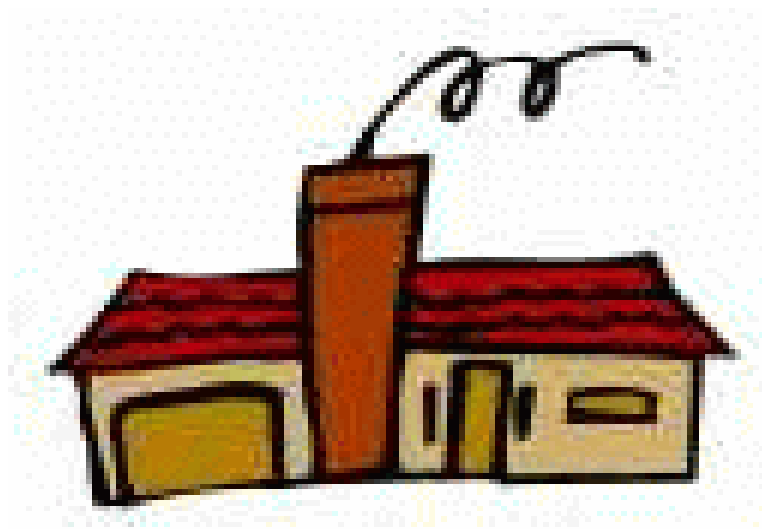


# IDENTIFYING AND VERIFYING THE SAFE FOSTER HOME

A STUDY AND ASSESSMENT METHOD



## A TRAINING SUMMARY

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## ACTION FOR CHILD PROTECTION

**ACTION is a private non-profit organization dedicated to the systematic advancement of safety intervention case practice and decision making in public child protective service agencies. ACTION's consultation, technical assistance and training emphasizes and supports the creation of effective and accountable safety intervention systems; competent CPS staff; expert supervisors; useful practice and decision making methods and relevant training that result in children being protected and caregivers restored to their protective role and responsibilities.**

## THE SAFE FOSTER HOME

**The Safe Foster Home assessment method provides an agency with a comprehensive understanding of the individuals and families applying to be foster families or families serving as foster families. It examines all aspects of the family functioning, including motivation for and commitment to becoming an foster home.**

## FEATURES OF THIS METHOD

**The assessment method uses a force field analysis methodology to examine the strengths present in a home. The method evaluates the significance of strengths from the perspective of positive family functioning and parenting. Positive family functioning and parenting form the benchmark for the safe foster home and supports approval of foster parent applicants and verifies continuing safety for those providing foster care.**

**The Safe Foster Home method evaluates information such as:**

- **Child, adult and family functioning**
- **Foster parents' perceptions of children, history, parenting and interpersonal relationships**
- **Foster parents' demographics and extended family relationships**
- **Understanding of issues in biological families and understanding the needs of children requiring care**
- **Preparation to be a foster home**

## BENEFITS OF THIS METHOD

- **Standardizes approval of adoptive and foster homes**
- **Organizes information collection**
- **Establishes criteria for assessing**
- **Identifies strengths of potential and serving foster homes**
- **Matches needs of children with available homes**
- **Provides supervisors with a means for worker proficiency in assessment**
- **Increases uniformity of decision making**
- **Promotes accountability**

**TRAINING AGENDA**  
**THE SAFE FOSTER HOME**  
**3 DAY WORKSHOP**

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**DAY 1**

<b>9:00 - 9:45</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Introductions and Workshop Preliminaries</b>
<b>9:45 - 12:15</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>The Belief System that Supports the Safe Foster Home Concept</b>
<b>1:15 - 2:30</b>	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>The Safe Foster Home</b>
<b>2:45 - 4:00</b>	<b>Session 4</b>	<b>The Instrument and Instructions</b>

**DAY 2**

<b>9:00 - 11:00</b>	<b>Session 5</b>	<b>The Protocol: Study Process and Privacy</b>
<b>11:00 - 12:00</b>	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>The Collins Family Analysis</b>
<b>1:00 - 4:15</b>	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>The Collins Family Analysis Continues</b>

**DAY 3**

<b>9:00 - 3:30</b>	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>The Collins Family Analysis Continues</b>
<b>3:30 - 4:00</b>	<b>Session 7</b>	<b>Workshop Closing &amp; Training Evaluation</b>

# DAY 1

## SESSION 1: INTRODUCTIONS AND WORKSHOP PRELIMINARIES

### OBJECTIVES

- To complete introductions and address workshop logistics.
- To address concerns participants have coming into training.
- To briefly review the history of the Safe Foster Home method.
- To explain workshop objectives.
- To review the workshop agenda.

### ORDER/OVERVIEW

1. Discussion/Presentation: Preparing for the Workshop
2. Introductions
3. Objectives and Agenda
4. Presentation: Overview of the Safe Foster Home

### RESOURCES

- |   |               |                                                               |
|---|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| X | Slide/Handout | <i>Paradigm</i>                                               |
| X | Slide/Handout | <i>Belief and Choice</i>                                      |
| X | Slide/Handout | <i>Mental Freedom</i>                                         |
| X | Slide         | <i>Workshop Objectives</i>                                    |
| X | Handout       | <i>Workshop Agenda</i>                                        |
| X | Slide         | <i>Benefits of the Safe Foster Home Structured Assessment</i> |
| X | Slide         | <i>Purposes of the Safe Foster Home</i>                       |

### SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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Workers beliefs, values and choices guide what they think is intended by their job; how they view foster families and what they expect from them; what they expect from themselves; and how they act. Our hope is that workers will come to see the Safe Foster

Home method vision as possible, that they can accept it and realize how effectively it will help them to study foster home applicants; how it can help them judge the quality of care in foster families already providing care; and how it can form the foundation for reaching confident decisions about safe foster homes.

Training objectives are discussed which are: to promote a family based orientation to the Safe Foster Home assessment method; to acquaint participants with responsibilities they will have for completing the Safe Foster Home assessment; and to increase participants' knowledge and skill in conducting the Safe Foster Home assessment and draw conclusions about the probability of foster homes being and remaining safe.

The agenda is reviewed. Similarities and differences between other CPS assessments and assessing foster families are presented. Benefits of the Safe Foster Home method and structured assessments are discussed. Purposes of the Safe Foster Home method are introduced: study and identification of the potential for placement stability and the likelihood of enhanced child development and well-being; identifying the family's capacity to provide care; identifying the needs and expectations that are present in the potential foster family; and determining whether the potential family should be approved.

## SESSION 2: THE BELIEF SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS THE SAFE FOSTER HOME CONCEPT

### OBJECTIVES

- To examine theoretic principles for assessing foster care applicants.
- To critically analyze how the identified theoretic principles are relevant to conducting foster family assessments.
- To identify any additional theories which might be applicable for assessing foster family applicants.

### ORDER/OVERVIEW

- |    |                       |                                                                   |
|----|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Exercise/Preparation: | Theoretical Base for Assessing the Foster Care Applicants         |
| 2. | Presentation:         | Theoretical Principles Related to the Safe Foster Home Assessment |

### RESOURCES

- |   |                 |                                                |
|---|-----------------|------------------------------------------------|
| X | Handout (Loose) | <i>Family Systems Theory</i>                   |
| X | Handout (Loose) | <i>Family Based Intervention Theory</i>        |
| X | Handout (Loose) | <i>Interpersonal Communication Theory</i>      |
| X | Handout (Loose) | <i>Role Theory</i>                             |
| X | Handout (Loose) | <i>Risk Assessment: Theoretical Principles</i> |

### SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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Through an exercise, five theories are offered to determine a family's suitability to serve and to understand and assess applicants.

**SESSION 3:**  
**THE SAFE FOSTER HOME**

**OBJECTIVES**

- To consider the positive conditions and factors that produce a stable family with positive placement potential.
- To identify and discuss the concept of the potential foster family as a focus for study which provide benchmarks for judging safety.
- To present the components of the Safe Foster Home.
- To define terms.
- To provide the rationale and connection between how identifying necessary content about positive parenting and functional family life enables one to address purposes and decisions.

**ORDER/OVERVIEW**

- 1. Presentation: The Safe Foster Home
- 2. Exercise

**RESOURCES**

- X Handout *The Safe Foster Home Handbook - Forms/Instructions*
- X Slide *Conceptual Framework*

**SESSION HIGHLIGHTS**

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Assessing is the professional competency upon which workers must rely in order to perform this work. The concept, content and process of assessing is discussed: information collection, information organizing, evaluating sufficiency, assessing and assigning significance, and justifying significance. This is where the Safe Foster Home *Instrument and Instructions* book is introduced.

# SESSION 4: THE SAFE FOSTER HOME INSTRUMENT AND INSTRUCTIONS

## OBJECTIVES

- To review the Safe Foster Home instructions.
- To review and discuss the Safe Foster Home instrument.
- To consider information collection approaches and issues.

## ORDER/OVERVIEW

1. Review: Instrument & Instructions
2. Case Review: The Baker Case/the Safe Foster Home Assessment

## RESOURCES

- |   |         |                                                      |
|---|---------|------------------------------------------------------|
| X | Handout | <i>The Safe Foster Home Handbook</i>                 |
| X | Handout | <i>Blank Safe Foster Home Instrument</i>             |
| X | Handout | <i>Completed Baker case for the Safe Foster Home</i> |

## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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The Safe Foster Home instrument to be used in assessing is given to the participants. The Safe Foster Home instrument is used for a new placement; for re-licensing; or for verifying continued safe indicators in a foster family providing care. Instructions as to completion are given.

The instrument is organized by safety indicators with specific categories of study. The instrument focuses documentation and analysis on what is positive within a family. Information is analyzed and given a value. The Conclusion provides for analysis and a final judgment about the suitability of the foster home.

An example of a completed study on a family is given to participants and discussed. Following are examples of a study provided during training. This example of a Safe Foster Home assessment considers the Parent Indicator by examining History and Adult General Functioning. The Conclusion shows the result of the assessment.

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THE SAFE FOSTER HOME

**Case Name *Baker***

**Case Number *25489b***

**Worker *Costello***

**Supervisor *Benjamin***

**INITIAL STUDY      X      DATE      05/10/--**

**RE-VERIFICATION      DATE**

# PARENT INDICATOR

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- 1. History:** *What is the foster parents' childhood and adult history? Consider the individual=s cultural context in your description. When re-licensing, describe new or significant information that indicates a change from the previous assessment.*

**Specific areas include:** marriages, divorces, births; employment; education; physical/mental health; childbearing or infertility; arrests or legal encounters; relationships (including other races/cultures); number and type of foster placements (CPS, Juvenile Justice, other); placement success or disruption; other information.

**Foster Parent #1:** *In growing up, Sue was primarily raised and nurtured by her maternal grandmother who lived in the home. Sue described always feeling loved. She indicated that she was never abused, but occasionally spanked. She remembers a certain sadness as a child. She lived in a rough neighborhood with very few friends and remembers often feeling lonely. Sue had two older brothers. One was a half brother and is now deceased. She was never close to him. Her other brother was significantly older than she and therefore very different from her. Due to age and personality differences, they have never been very close. Both of Sue's parents were alcoholics. Her parents were killed when she was 10 years old in an alcohol related auto accident, at which time she continued to live with her grandmother. In the years following her parents' deaths, Sue had a difficult time adjusting. She indicated that she often worried about her grandmother dying and leaving her alone. She credits her grandmother's love and devotion with helping her overcoming her feelings of loss. After entering high school, things were remarkably better, mainly due to the fact that she became involved in some school activities and developed some friendships. John and Sue agreed when they married that she would not work outside the home. Sue did not attend school beyond high school. (Interview 4/30/00)*

**Rating:** 2.5

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**Foster Parent #2:** *Religion in John's family of origin was very important. John's mother ran the household and was a very independent woman. John's mother was the primary disciplinarian and on occasion would use physical punishment. However, the form of discipline used most often was the removal of privileges and natural consequences. John does not recall his father ever using physical discipline with the exception of perhaps one or two occasions. He remembers his parents having a good marriage and describes his family of origin as being very physically affectionate with each other. John is the youngest of 3 children. There is a big age gap between all siblings so they were not close growing up. John's sister, Emma, was a good role model regarding how to parent. John indicated that he was essentially a "model" kid growing up with occasional normal rebellious behavior. John attended a small college in New York but did not graduate. John then moved to the Midwest from New York because he did not believe that NY was a good place to raise children. John and Sue bought a farm in Smithville and lost it to foreclosure. This was the most difficult time in their lives, both emotionally and financially. John now feels that they lost the farm so that he could be called to be a minister. Therefore, he attended seminary after they lost the farm. He has been married to Sue for almost 20 years. (Interview 4-9-00)*

**Rating:** 3.5

## PARENT INDICATOR

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**2. Adult General Functioning t:** *How does the adult function with respect to daily management and general adaptation? When re-licensing, describe new or significant information that indicates a change from the previous assessment.*

**Specific areas include:** problem solving capacity/history, response/reaction to stress, ability to communicate, styles of communication, cognitive functioning; ability to make judgments/decisions and capacity/history to follow through; use of defense mechanisms; levels of self-esteem; awareness of own capabilities and limitations; ability to control emotions; adaptation to infertility (if appropriate); levels of impulse control; expression of emotions/feelings/general temperament; attitudes towards people of similar/different races, cultures, religions; attitudes toward and response to sexual contact between children (if appropriate); homophobia; substance use issues; mental health issues.

**Foster Parent #1:** *Sue is vivacious, energetic, physically healthy, talkative and laughs a lot. She admits having brief depressive episodes in the past. The longest period of depression occurred following the birth of her child. She is warm and makes people feel comfortable. She tends to exceedingly accommodate others and is therefore not always assertive when it coming to expressing her needs. At times she presents as being pessimistic and would describe herself as frequently being a "glass half empty" person. She is deeply religious but says she is "not preachy." She is nurturing and gracious. She communicates very well and appears confident when not discussing herself. Conversations related to her own well-being and functioning were somewhat more difficult for her. Generally, she is very likable and spontaneous. She exercises regularly and dresses nicely. Sue does not drink because of her parents' history with alcohol (see history element). Sue's relationships with her friends and family members are positive and functional. She shows good judgment in the choices she makes in her daily life, i.e. leisure activities, hobbies, friends, etc. (Interview 4/30/00)*

**Rating: 3.5**

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**Foster Parent #2:** *John is affable, rather quiet and calm. He would describe himself as compassionate. John states that his spirituality/religion is his priority. He says he rarely gets angry but when he does he leaves the house and walks to cool off. He indicated that during periods of stress he tends to have “a short fuse”. He denies ever being violent. He says God shows him the way in his life. He occasionally refers to biblical verses when describing his lifestyle. John is very happy as a minister. John is intelligent, he appears thoughtful and deliberate which sometimes makes him appear rigid. Generally, John appears to get along well with friends and family. He is physically healthy, does not use drugs or alcohol, and often participates in recreational outlets. He appears well adjusted and capable of making effective decisions. (Interview 4/30/00)*

**Rating: 3.5**

<b>PARENT INDICATORS</b>	<b>CHILD INDICATORS</b>	<b>FAMILY INDICATORS</b>	<b>BIRTH INDICATORS</b>	<b>FOSTER FAMILY INDICATORS</b>	<b>COLLABORATION INDICATORS</b>						
History	2.5	Child Funct	4	Family Funct.	4	Viewpoint Parent	3	Preparation	4	Family	4
Adult General	3	Family Support	4	Viewpoint Child	3.5	Motivation	4	Resource	4		
Parenting Discipline	3	Demographic	4								
Parenting General	4										

# CONCLUSION

1. **Add the ratings entered above in the 14 indicators. 51**  
*(If no child in home, score "0" on "Child Functioning" in the Child Indicators)*
  
2. **Based on the rating in #1, identify the presence of positive parenting/  
effective family functioning; the likelihood of stability; and indication of safety:**
  - a. **Very positive foster family home/Very strong safety indicators ..... (48 to 56) X**  
The presence of positive parenting and effective family functioning are apparent. There appear to be no concerning family conditions which exist; the parents' capability to care for children is adequate. Based on appropriate matching, a child will likely be/is enhanced by this placement. Indications are that a placement will be/is secure, productive, stable and safe.
  
  - b. **Generally positive foster family home/Generally strong safety indicators (37 to 47) \_\_\_\_\_**  
Generally, there is evidence of positive parenting and effective family functioning. There are indications that there is a balance between the capacity, conditions, and needs of the family and the needs of the child. There are some family conditions of concern and the family is aware of and willing to address them. Consideration should be given to continue matching of the skills and abilities of the family with the needs of the child in order to insure that the child will continue to be enhanced by the placement. With preparation and support indicators are that a placement will be secure, productive, stable and safe.
  
  - c. **Somewhat positive foster family home/Somewhat strong safety indicators(22 to 36.5) \_\_\_\_\_**  
Although there is evidence of positive parenting and effective family functioning, there is an indication that the child may not benefit/be benefiting from this placement and the placement may be problematic. There may be an imbalance between the capacity, conditions, and needs of the family and the needs of the child. Consideration should be given to the most pronounced negative family conditions and how manageable or adjustable they are. Documentation in the case record as to these concerning family conditions needs to be clear. When re-licensing, a support/action plan should be entered into with the foster family in order to manage the most concerning or challenging family conditions, if they are considered serious enough to address. The stability, security and productiveness of a placement is questionable; should negative family conditions worsen safety could become a concern.
  
  - d. **Negative foster family home/Weak safety indicators .....(11 to 21.5) \_\_\_\_\_**  
Enough negative family conditions and influences have been identified within the family so that a child is likely to not benefit from this placement; the placement may disrupt; and maintaining a safe home is questionable. There is an imbalance between the capacity, conditions, and needs of the home and the needs of the child. Analyses of the most concerning family conditions should occur. Documentation in the case record regarding the nature and quality of concerning family conditions should be clear. If a placement exists when re-licensing, it is recommended that consideration be given to removing the children from the home and that the family not be approved for any future placements.
  
  - e. **Very negative foster family home/Very weak safety indicators .....(0 to 10.5) \_\_\_\_\_**  
It is probable that the child will suffer/is suffering directly from this placement; that the placement will disrupt; and/or a child will not be safe. Continued or future placements of a child could result in some form of maltreatment to the child. The agency needs to inform the family of the areas of concern. All negative family conditions should be documented in the case record. It is recommended that if a placement exists, the child should be removed from the home. The home should not be approved for any future placements. If ANY children reside in this family, consideration should be given about their safety and the need for making a referral for a CPS assessment.

# DAY 2

## SESSION 5: THE PROTOCOL: STUDY PROCESS AND PRIVACY

## SESSION 6: THE COLLINS FAMILY

### OBJECTIVES

- To review the Safe Foster Home interviewing protocol.
- To analyze privacy issues associated with assessing foster parent applicants.
- To describe the role of the assessor in the process of assessing foster parent applicants.
- To consider the role of the applicant in the assessment process.
- To identify expectations regarding assessing foster parent applicants.

### ORDER/OVERVIEW

1. Review: The Safe Foster Home Protocol
2. Nominal Group Exercise: Privacy
3. Exercise: Roles & Expectations
4. Closing Summary

### RESOURCES

- |   |                         |                                                                     |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| X | Handout                 | <i>Adoption/Foster Family Assessment Protocol</i>                   |
| X | Slide                   | <i>Analytical Questions</i>                                         |
| X | Handout (Loose Handout) | <i>Roles and Expectations for the Casework Assessor</i>             |
| X | Handout (Loose Handout) | <i>Roles and Expectations for Adoption/Foster Parent Applicants</i> |

### SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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The Safe Foster Home protocol provides guidance and increases the consistency among workers doing assessments. The difficulty of inquiring into the private areas of people's lives is addressed.

**In a group exercise, the Roles and Expectations for the Casework Assessor and the Roles and Expectations for Foster Parent Applicants@ are considered.**

**The second session on this day introduces the training case that is used to assure that participants experience all aspects of implementing the Safe Foster Home method. See the description of content and exercises related to the Collins family to follow.**

# DAY 3

## SESSION 6: THE COLLINS FAMILY CONTINUES

### OBJECTIVES

- To prepare for completing a Safe Foster Home instrument.
- To observe and critique interviews/information collection.
- To discuss and analyze family data.
- To individually complete a Safe Foster Home instrument.

### ORDER/OVERVIEW

- |     |                     |                                                            |
|-----|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Reading:            | The Collins' Autobiographies                               |
| 2.  | Group Staffing:     | Preparing for Information Collection                       |
| 3.  | Video:              | The Collins Family: Initial Meeting                        |
| 4.  | Group Staffing:     | Critique of Interview and Discussion of Family Information |
| 5.  | Exercise:           | Data Entry into the Safe Foster Family Instrument          |
| 6.  | Video:              | The Collins Family: Michael Collins                        |
| 7.  | Group Staffing:     | Critique of Interview and Discussion of Michael Collins    |
| 8.  | Exercise:           | Data Entry into the Safe Foster Home Instrument            |
| 9.  | Video:              | The Collins Family: Joyce Collins                          |
| 10. | Group Staffing:     | Critique of Interview and Discussion of Collins            |
| 11. | Exercise:           | Data Entry into the Safe Foster Home Instrument            |
| 12. | Video:              | Closing Interview                                          |
| 13. | Group Staffing:     | Critique of Interview and Discussion of Collins            |
| 14. | Exercise:           | Completion of the Safe Foster Home Instrument              |
| 15. | Debrief/Discussion: | The Collins Family as Safe Foster Home                     |

### RESOURCES

- |   |         |                                                      |
|---|---------|------------------------------------------------------|
| X | Slide   | <i>Session Objectives</i>                            |
| X | Handout | <i>Collins' Autobiographies</i>                      |
| X | Slide   | <i>Preparing for the Safe Foster Home Assessment</i> |
| X | Video   | <i>The Collins Family</i>                            |
| X | Slide   | <i>Group Staffing</i>                                |

X	Handout	<i>Blank Safe Foster Home Instrument</i> (in participant Handout book)
X	Handout	<i>The Safe Foster Home Instrument &amp; Instructions Handbook</i>
X	Handout (Loose Handout)	<i>Addendum to Collins Family Video</i>
X	Handout (Loose Handout)	<i>Completed Safe Foster Home on the Collins Family</i>

## SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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This session attempts to bring together all that has been considered through the week. A real family case is considered. Although the family here is applying to be a foster family, they are interested in adopting.

Participants read autobiographies of the parents. They are divided into four groups where they discuss general impressions, establish a schedule for interview completion, determine where the interviews will take place, consider how to communicate the purpose of the study, their role, the family's role and other expectations, and identify specific concerns and areas that they wish to focus on during information collection. They record their decisions on a flip chart. Each group's chart is reviewed.

A video of the family is shown which covers an initial meeting, interviews with each adult and a closing meeting. Each individual participant will enter data into the Safe Foster Home instrument based on what they know.

Reconvening in their same groups, they will discuss the interviews, the interviewer's approach, good and poor performance, things they would have done differently and how, and identifying other information they need.

Using the Safe Foster Home instrument, the instructor will cover each element one at a time. A completed form on the family is handed out to the participants for their review and comments.

## SESSION 7: WORKSHOP CLOSING

### OBJECTIVES

- To wrap up the training program

### ORDER/OVERVIEW

1. Presentation: Wrap Up

### RESOURCES

- X Loose Handout *Field Assignment (accompanied by blank form)*
- X Video *Multiple Transitions: A Young Child's Point of View  
On Foster Care*
- X Handout *Training Evaluation*

### SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

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#### OPTIONAL

Participants are given a field assignment. The assignment is to complete a Safe Foster Home assessment on a new case or to use a previously completed and documented family study. They are to review the completed assessment with their supervisor and then to mail their completed Safe Foster Home assessment to ACTION for Child Protection. They are also asked to identify questions and/or concerns they have about the Safe Foster Home method..

Follow-up consultation will be conducted to provide specific feedback and assistance with completed field work will include general direction about applying the Safe Foster Home method and will address questions and concerns staff have identified.