

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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December 2011

Overcoming Barriers to Shared Parenting

By now, everyone working in child welfare in North Carolina knows about shared parenting. The practice made its first official appearance in 2001 with the pilot of the Multiple Response System (MRS); in 2006 it expanded to all 100 counties when the MRS went statewide. Since then the Division of Social Services has integrated shared parenting into training for child welfare staff and foster parents; in addition, ten pages of our state's child welfare policy are devoted to the topic (<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/chg/CSs1201c11.pdf>).

Despite all this, anecdotal reports suggest that we still sometimes struggle to implement shared parenting. So let's consider solutions to common barriers to shared parenting at different stages of the child welfare process.

PLACEMENT STAGE

Once the decision is made to place a child in out-of-home care, shared parenting can begin. Common problems at this stage include: *continued next page*

Shared Parenting Is NC Policy

Shared parenting is an "inclusive practice," which means the birth parent is integrated into the child's life while the child is in out-of-home care. According to Leathers (2002), inclusive practice "encourages or requires birth parents to participate in the direct care of the child whenever possible by allowing them to have access to the child through informal visiting and other contacts. . . . In the inclusive practice model, the foster parent functions as a temporary caregiver for the child and a supportive role model to the parent (Landy & Munro, 1998). Advocates of inclusive practice argue it results in increased parental visiting, is less disruptive for the child, and results in fewer attachment conflicts and placement disruptions (Palmer, 1995, 1996)."

Shared Parenting

- An alliance among important people in the child's life.
- A meeting. Policy requires agencies arrange a face-to-face meeting between birth and foster families within 7 days of placement.
- An ongoing process that often involves a continuum of contact between foster parents, birth parents, and children in foster care.

MRS Meetings

MRS and System of Care meetings take place three times monthly via conference call.

Dates and call-in and login information are listed below.

January 18, 19, & 24

10:00-11:30 a.m.

Call-in number:
218/936-4141

Access code: 956303

Link to join in on the web:
[https://
dss.ncgovconnect.com/mrs](https://dss.ncgovconnect.com/mrs)

MRS Questions?

If you have questions regarding the implementation of any aspect of MRS, please contact Holly McNeill 828/757-5672
holly.mcneill@dhhs.nc.gov

Training Dates

Adult Mental Health Issues Which Impact Families Served by Child Welfare

Feb. 1-17

Feb. 28-March 15

April 17-May 5

All online

Child Development in Families at Risk

Jan. 10-Feb. 7

Feb. 14-March 13

March 1-29

All online

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>

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Comments?

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Online

www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/mrs

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Safety Concerns. Foster parents sometimes fear birth parents will physically hurt them. Possible solutions:

- Normalize foster parent fears: concern about safety is valid and legitimate.
- Assess: take time to consider risks to everyone's safety and plan concrete ways to minimize those risks, especially in the beginning of shared parenting.
- Emphasize that shared parenting is about building relationships between foster and birth parents; this takes time. Encourage a gradual approach.
- If physical contact with birth parents appears risky, explore indirect ways to involve birth parents in their children's lives.

A meeting between birth and foster families is just one of many ways to do shared parenting.

Inertia. Sometimes the social worker and foster parents say they're willing, but shared parenting behaviors are just not happening. Possible solutions:

- Train/retrain. Review potential benefits of shared parenting for the child, foster family, birth family, and agency (see box below).
- Start small (e.g., request pictures of child's family to display in child's room).
- Explore fears and reservations. Take time to explore with each person how their partnership is going, what their concerns are, and what can be done to share information and maintain connections.
- Factor in grief. The grief they experience when their children are placed can lead birth parents to act in ways that discourage shared parenting. "Building a Positive Relationship with Birth Parents," an article by Donna Foster, offers helpful suggestions for understanding and responding to birth parent grief; you'll find it at <http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/fpv13n1/foster.htm>.

REASONABLE EFFORTS STAGE

After placement, the agency must continue to make reasonable efforts to support the family, maintain/strengthen family bonds, reduce risk to the child, and increase parents' protective capacity. Common barriers to shared parenting after the initial placement phase include:

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Potential Benefits

For birth parent

- Better understanding of child's needs
- Gain a role model and support for appropriate behavior and positive parenting

For foster parent/agency

- Get realistic picture of parent's strengths and needs
- Gain more information about child and family

For child

- Parents who are better able to nurture and protect
- Attachment to parent maintained and/or strengthened
- Smoother transitions into care and back home = less trauma
- Ongoing support for family after reunification

Relationships with their families can help children resolve the trauma of separation and develop a healthy identity. (Tiddy, 1986)

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Internal Opposition. Other members of child welfare team may say and do things to restrain or prevent shared parenting. Possible solutions:

- Advocate for foster parents with colleagues to ensure shared parenting and child and family team meetings take place and are conveniently scheduled for both families.
- Identify and address the fears and concerns of those who do not support shared parenting.
- Offer training. The Division's shared parenting course prepares you to present information about shared parenting as part of staff meetings or in-service training in your agency.

Anxiety Over Visit Supervision. When can/should foster parents supervise visits? What is the relationship between this and shared parenting?

- Don't rush. Involve the foster parent with the birth parent gradually. Once trust is developed, it may be appropriate for a foster parent to supervise family visits.
- Set the stage for success. Foster parents should talk to the social worker and be fully on board before moving to foster parent supervision of visits. Foster parents need specific training on supervising visits.
- Debrief. Separately, foster parents and birth parents should tell the social worker how the visit went. This gives the social worker information both about parent progress and how well shared parenting is going.

PERMANENCY STAGE

Shared parenting can ease the transition for the child and birth family, whether the child is going home or achieving permanence in some other way. Barriers at this stage can include:

Reunification Tension. As safety issues are addressed, children start spending more time with their parents, which means more handoffs and mini-transitions (e.g., for overnight visits with parents). Many foster families are concerned and upset when the birth parents keep the children up late, feed them junk food, or fail to enforce the foster home's rules and expectations. Solutions:

- Make it clear you understand that foster parents' feelings and objections are motivated by concern for the children. Normalize their frustration, anxiety, and other feelings.
- Reiterate your appreciation for the gift they are giving children and their families by being part of the team that helps birth parents become better able to nurture and protect the child.
- Coach foster parents to continue sending the message to birth families that their goal is to help the children return home.

CONCLUSION

These suggestions are just a start. To learn more about successfully implementing shared parenting, attend the Division's course on this topic (see box above).

Take the Course

Shared Parenting is a two-day course for all child welfare staff that explores the roles staff play in developing, encouraging, and facilitating relationships between the agency, birth families, and foster families. To register, visit <http://www.ncswlearn.org>.

Training Dates

Child Welfare Practices for Cases Involving Domestic Violence

May 10-11
Charlotte

May 16-17
Greensboro

CPS Assessments

Feb. 7-10
Fayetteville

March 13-16
Charlotte

April 10-13
Greensboro

CPS In-Home Services

February 14-17
Charlotte

March 27-30
Greensboro

Effects of Separation and Loss on Attachment

January 12-13
Fayetteville

Fostering and Adopting the Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused

January 10-13
New Bern

March 6-9
Charlotte

May 15-18
Candler

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>

Training Dates

Intake

February 8-10
Greensboro

May 16-18
Fayetteville

Legal Aspects

January 5-6
Fayetteville

May 10-11
Gastonia

May 31-June 1
Hillsborough

Medical Aspects

January 11-12
Smithfield

February 28-29
Fayetteville

March 7-8
Greenville

April 26-27
Candler

May 14-15
Greensboro

MAPP-GPS

Feb. 14-March 2
Beaufort

March 20-30
Charlotte

April 10-20
Candler

Motivating Substance Abusing Families to Change

January 24
Candler

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>



Reinstatement of Parental Rights: Summary of North Carolina's New Law

by Janet Mason, UNC School of Government

Section 18 of S.L. 2011-295 (H 382)* adds new G.S. 7B-1114, establishing for the first time a juvenile court proceeding in which the parental rights of a parent whose rights have been terminated may be reinstated. Previously, the only means of regaining parental rights was for the parent to adopt the child. Circumstances in which the procedure is available, beginning October 1, 2011, are narrow.

New law went into effect October 1, 2011.

- A motion to reinstate parental rights may be filed only by the guardian ad litem attorney or a DSS that has custody of the child.
- The child must be at least 12 years old or, if the child is younger than 12, the motion must allege extraordinary circumstances requiring consideration of the motion.
- The juvenile must not have a legal parent, must not be in an adoptive placement, and must not be likely to be adopted within a reasonable time.
- The order terminating parental rights must have been entered at least three years before the motion is filed, unless the juvenile's attorney advocate and the DSS with custody stipulate that the child's permanent plan is no longer adoption.

If a motion could be filed and a parent contacts DSS or the child's guardian ad litem about reinstatement of the parent's rights, DSS or the guardian ad litem must notify the child that the child has a right to file a motion for reinstatement of parental rights. If the child does not have a guardian ad litem when a motion is filed, the court must appoint one.

The party filing the motion must serve it on each of the following that is not the movant: the child, the child's guardian ad litem or guardian ad litem attorney, the DSS with custody of the child, and the former parent whose rights the motion seeks to have reinstated. Although the former parent must be served, the former parent is not a party and is not entitled to appointed counsel if indigent.

The party filing the motion must ask the clerk to calendar it for a preliminary hearing within 60 days of the filing and must give at least 15 days notice to those who were required to be served and to the child's placement provider (who is not made a party by virtue of receiving notice). At least seven days before the preliminary hearing, DSS and the child's guardian ad litem must provide the court, the other parties, and the former parent with reports that address a list of factors specified in the new statute. At the preliminary hearing the court must consider those criteria and make findings about those that are relevant. At the conclusion of the hearing, the court must either dismiss the motion or order that the child's permanent plan become reinstatement of parental rights.

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* S.L. 2011-295 (H 382) is effective October 1, 2011, and applies to actions filed or pending on or after that date.

Reinstatement of Parental Rights Law *from page 4*

If the motion is not dismissed at the preliminary hearing, the court must conduct hearings at least every six months until the petition is granted or dismissed, which must occur within 12 months from the date the motion was filed unless the court makes written findings about why that cannot occur and specifies a time frame for entering a final order. At any hearing under the new section the court may enter an order for visitation under G.S. 7B-905(c) or order that the child be placed in the former parent's home and supervised by DSS. If the court orders placement in the former parent's home, the child's placement and care remain the responsibility of the DSS with custody.

After an order reinstating parental rights, the court is not required to conduct further reviews. A parent whose rights are reinstated is not liable for child support or the cost of services provided to the child after the termination order and before the reinstatement order.

Keep an eye out: the Division of Social Services is developing policy and practice guidance about this new law. Look for it in February 2012.

New Registry Website for Vacant Social Services Positions

There is a new online, single portal job registry for social services jobs in North Carolina: <http://ssw.unc.edu/dssjobsnc>.

With input from key stakeholder groups including the NC Division of Social Services (NCDSS), county directors of social services, county human resource staff, and social work students, the website was designed and developed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work's Child Welfare Workforce Collaborative. The project also garnered support through a cooperative agreement with the Administration for Children and Families. The primary purpose of the site is to connect job seekers with available social services positions in North Carolina. The site will allow job seekers to learn about current vacancies and about the county and agency where the position is based.

The Child Welfare Workforce Collaborative is reaching out to social work education programs across the state to reach graduates and other potential job seekers. Connections are also being made to other websites where jobs are posted such as the Office of State Personnel, the Employment Security Commission, the North Carolina chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services, and NCDSS.

If you have any questions about this project or the website, please contact the Child Welfare Workforce Collaborative's Selena Childs (919/834-8144, sbchilds@email.unc.edu).

For more information about the Child Welfare Workforce Collaborative, visit <http://ssw.unc.edu/wc/index.htm>.



We made it **SIMPLE** for you.

Training Dates

Placement

Feb. 21-24
Greenville

March 20-23
Fayetteville

April 2-5
Charlotte

Shared Parenting

January 24-25
New Bern

Jan. 31-Feb. 1
Fayetteville

March 12-13
Greensboro

April 23-24
Candler

Staying Power! A Supervisor's Guide to Retaining Staff

March 21-23
Greensboro

May 21-23
Candler

Step-by-Step: An Introduction to CFTs

January 5-6
Tarboro

January 10-11
Guilford Co. Area

January 24-25
Clinton

February 7-8
Hoke County

Understanding and Intervening in Child Neglect

February 6-17
Online

To learn about these courses or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>