
SUPPORTING BIOLOGICAL PARENTS IN CHILD WELFARE CASES



AMANDA MITTEN, MA, LPC
HANNAH FRYE, MA, LPC



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
Health Sciences Center

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify empirical evidence for parent-child visitation in child welfare cases to support ongoing inclusion of the biological parent(s) in services for meeting long-term goals of family reunification.
- Discuss professional and parental perception of service providers and the role these systems play.
- Discuss recommendations for the management of difficult/challenging emotions and behaviors demonstrated by biological parents in therapeutic or other services.
- Identify and problem solve ways to engage biological parents in services with and/or without their child(ren) in cases where the child(ren) are placed in foster care.



THE STATE OF OUR COUNTRY



How many kids are in foster care?

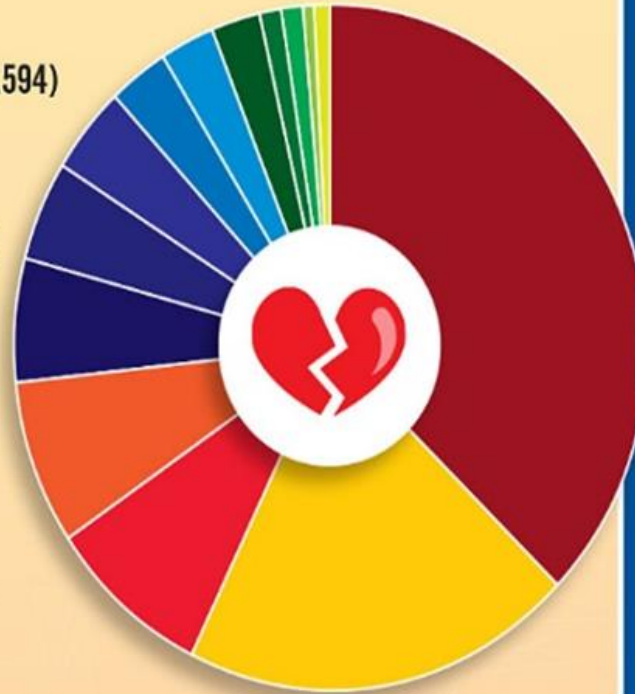
The US foster care system serves over 600,000 kids annually. West Virginia, Alaska, and Montana have the highest rates.

Updated on Wed, August 23, 2023 by the [USA Facts Team](#)

Year	Served	In Care On Sept 30th	Entered	Exited	Waiting For Adoption	Parental Rights Terminated	Adopted
2012	630,000	392,000	250,000	238,000	99,600	58,400	52,000
2013	633,000	396,000	253,000	237,000	102,000	58,900	50,800
2014	646,000	411,000	264,000	235,000	106,000	61,200	50,700
2015	663,000	421,000	269,000	242,000	110,000	62,200	53,500
2016	680,000	430,000	273,000	250,000	117,000	65,500	57,200
2017	685,000	437,000	270,000	249,000	124,000	69,900	59,500
2018	690,000	437,000	264,000	252,000	127,000	72,000	63,100
2019	676,000	426,000	252,000	250,000	124,000	71,900	66,200
2020	632,000	407,000	217,000	224,000	117,000	63,800	57,900
2021	606,000	391,000	207,000	215,000	114,000	65,000	54,200

REASONS CHILDREN WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR HOMES:

- Neglect 63% (158,258)
- Drug Abuse (Parent) 34% (86,694)
- Caretaker Inability To Cope 14% (34,594)
- Physical Abuse 13% (32,008)
- Housing 10% (25,658)
- Child Behavior Problem 8% (20,871)
- Parent Incarceration 7% (17,669)
- Alcohol Abuse (Parent) 5% (13,637)
- Abandonment 5% (11,424)
- Sexual Abuse 4% (9,782)
- Drug Abuse (Child) 2% (5,500)
- Child Disability 2% (3,969)
- Relinquishment 1% (2,350)
- Parent Death 1% (2,141)
- Alcohol Abuse (Child) 0% (991)

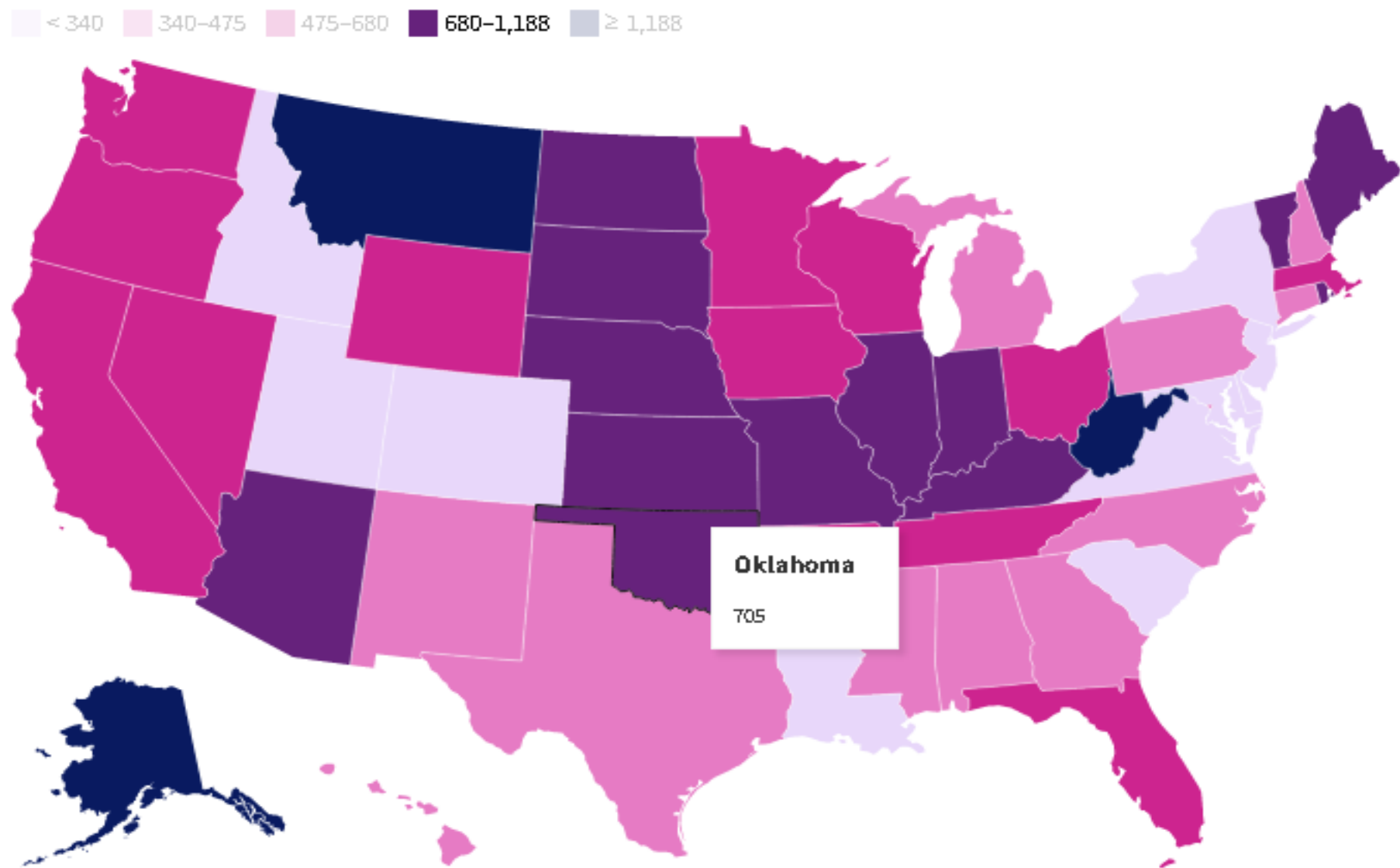


#ChildAbusePreventionMonth



SOURCE: AFCARS FY 2019. Note: The percentages are not mutually exclusive and children can be removed for more than one reason.

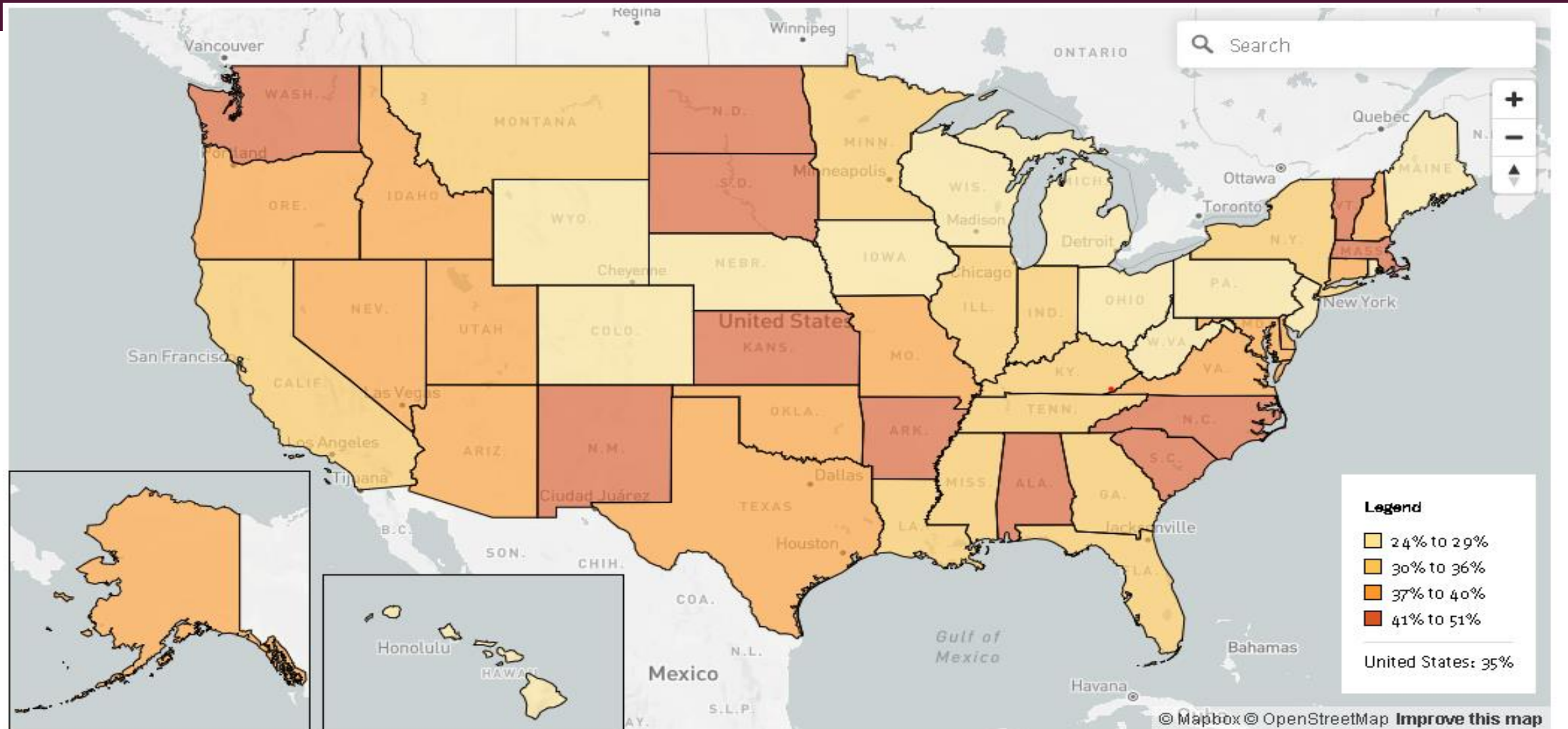
Children in foster care per 100,000 residents under age 21 as of September 30, 2021



Census Bureau 2021 population estimates were used to calculate foster care rates.

Source: [Department of Health & Human Services](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Download image](#) • [Download SVG](#)

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WITH MORE THAN TWO PLACEMENTS IN UNITED STATES - 2021





THE STATE OF OUR STATE




Out-of-Home Care

Children in Oklahoma Human Services custody, including those in foster care, inpatient care, trial adoption, trial reunification or similar settings are defined as residing in out-of-home care. The goal for most of these children is to return them to their own homes. The number of children in out-of-home care continued to decrease in FY22, with 3,353 children entering care.

Number of Children Entering Out-of-Home Care Continued to Decrease in FY22

FY18	4,660
FY19	4,416
FY20	4,177
FY21	3,461
FY22	3,353

In FY22, **1,742** children were safely reunited with their families.

In FY22, **1,545**  adoptions were finalized and 366 legal guardianships were established.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

- Reunification is the most common goal for children in foster care or other “out-of-home” placement
- Why?
 - Better overall outcomes (family preservation)
 - Positive impact on parents
 - Better development outcomes
 - Less stress for children
 - Positive ties to extended families



WHAT CAN FAMILIES PROVIDE?

- Primary social context in which children function
- Influence access to services
- Shape attitude toward service use that can be critical to outcomes
- Parents' knowledge of their children, family circumstances, and cultural context is essential
- Long-term predictors for parents who participate in mental health services with their children:
 - More equipped to understand their children's developmental needs
 - More equipped to implement therapeutic strategies in the home environment
 - More equipped to engage in positive parenting post-reunification

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY TIME (PARENT-CHILD VISITATION)

- Change in language – Use of “family time” lends to the importance of the length and quality of time
- Research suggests meaningful family time close in time to removal may help reduce stress and anxiety for children in out-of-home care
- Visitation should be liberal and presumed unsupervised unless there is a demonstrated, safety risk to the child
- Family time should not be used as a case compliance reward or consequence
 - National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)

FEDERAL GUIDELINES FOR CHILD WELFARE

- Take all steps necessary to assure the parent that family time will be a top priority before removal
- Arrange family time as soon as possible after removal, arranging contact within 24 hours or less of the initial removal, unless there is a clear and present safety threat to the child
- Ensure that family time is a central part of every case plan
- Create policy and promote practice that presumes family time should be unsupervised absent an identified present danger of harm
- Utilize non-threatening, natural, family-like settings for visits to occur

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES: Administration on Children, Youth and Families

ACYF-CB-IM-20-02

VISITATION POLICY

OAC 340:75-6-30

- a) **Visitation is a right.** • 1 The child and parent have a right to regular visitation when the child is in Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) custody and in an out-of-home placement.
 - (1) A court may not deny visitation based solely on the failure of a parent to prove that the parent has not used legal or illegal substances or complied with an aspect of the court-ordered individualized service plan per Section 1-4-707 of Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes (10A O.S. § 1-4-707).
 - (2) When the court determines reunification services are appropriate for the child and parent, the court allows reasonable visitation with the parent or legal guardian from whose custody the child was removed, unless visitation is not in the child's best interests, considering the child's:
 - (A) physical safety;
 - (B) need for protection from traumatizing contact with the parent or sibling or contact that could endanger the child's life; and • 3 & 4
 - (C) expressed wishes.

VISITATION POLICY

OAC 340:75-6-30

- (b) **Frequency of parent-child visitation.** Per 10A O.S. § 1-7-105, the child has the right to communicate and visit with his or her family, kin, and community on a regular basis, provided the communication or visitation is in the best interests of the child.
 - (1) Family visitation begins no later than seven-calendar days after the child's removal from the home.
 - (2) A visitation schedule that considers the child's needs is developed and includes a minimum of one visit per week during the first 90-calendar days from the date of the child's removal and then a minimum of two times per calendar month visitation thereafter until the child is returned or the permanency plan is no longer reunification. • 1
 - (3) Exceptions to the frequency of visitation, including the termination of visitation are made, when the:
 - (A) parent fails or declines to cooperate with visitation arrangements;
 - (B) court orders no visitation;
 - (C) whereabouts of the parent is unknown despite continuous attempts to locate;
 - (D) visitation, even when supervised, endangers or is determined not to be in the child's best interest;
 - (E) court orders a different visitation frequency; or
 - (F) the permanency plan is not reunification.

VISITATION

- Research supports the significance of parent-child visitation as a predictor of family reunification (Leathers, 2002)
- More frequent parent-child visits are associated with shorter placements in foster care (Benedict & White, 1991)
- Children who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to be returned to their parent's care (Chambers, Brocato, Faterni & Rodriguez, 2016)
- Compared to children who had fewer parental contacts, children who had consistent and timely contact with their parents had stronger bonds and experienced fewer placement moves (McWey & Mullis, 2004)



SO, WHAT WORKS AT THE CHILD WELFARE LEVEL?

BRIDGING PARENTAL NEEDS AND CHILD WELFARE MANDATES

- Early, responsive, and structured outreach
- Practical help
- Parent education and empowerment
- Supportive relationships with peers, foster parents, and workers
- **Collaboration and partnership**
- Inclusive, family-centered organizational cultures

"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.".

Mother Teresa

 tameday

SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FACILITATED BY

- Focus on child safety
- Family well-being
- Community partnerships
 - Parents
 - Service providers
 - Local organizations
 - Private citizens
- Inclusion of these resulted in a rate of reunification at 76% when compared to a control group of 44%
- In addition to:
 - Fewer days in out-of-home placement
 - Fewer placement moves
 - Lower likelihood to re-enter placement
 - Higher likelihood to be placed in their own neighborhoods or communities

Chambers, Brocato, Fatemi, & Rodriguez, 2016



WORKING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH BIO PARENTS





COMMON CHALLENGES

SHARE WITH US...



WHERE ARE THINGS GOING AWRY?

- Low and uneven levels of engagements
 - But wait, isn't parent participation the gold standard for child mental health interventions?
- Services to parents and children tend to be separated
- Underutilization of important opportunities for parent-child interventions
- The system shapes (and often confounds) efforts to engage parents in multiple aspects of the child welfare case
- Families most in need of services are least likely to engage in them
- Mismatched services provided based on family need

RACIAL DISPARITIES

- Children of color are less likely than White children to reunite with parents or kin or to be adopted (Courtney, 1994; McDonald, Poertner, & Jennings, 2007; Wells & Guo, 1999)
- Minority children are likelier than White children to remain long term in foster care (Cheng, 2010; Schmidt-Tieszen & McDonald, 1998)
- Allegations of maltreatment against parents of color are 2 to 9 times more likely to be substantiated than such an allegation against White parents (Ards, Myers, Malkis, Sugrue, & Zhou, 2003; Hill, 2007)



What feelings are coming up for you when
those challenges arise?



What am I saying about myself? About the caregiver?



WHAT ABOUT THE PARENTS? WHAT FEELINGS ARE
COMING UP FOR THEM?





FEAR RESENTMENT
DANGER GERMS
PERCEPTIONS
MISQUOTES
MENTAL HEALTH

GETTING CURIOUS – ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Am I providing praise to the caregiver?
- Have I asked their biggest problems, needs, goals?
- Am I validating their feelings and needs?
- Have I asked for feedback
 - On understanding of the problem?
 - On therapy in general?
 - On specific strategies I have introduced?

INCREASING PARENTING ENGAGEMENT – WHAT WORKS??

- Ask caregiver to tell me what they heard/took away
- Ask willingness to try it this week
- Role model example of a skill
- Have caregiver practice in role play with you – make it fun!
- Have parent practice in session using the skill with the child

INCREASING PARENTING ENGAGEMENT – WHAT WORKS??

- Set a goal for the week that the parent can achieve – boost confidence
- Give handout (or other method) for tracking skill use
- Follow up on tracking previous week in the next session
- Problem-solve how to make it more effective for them

MANAGEMENT OF CHALLENGING PARENTAL BEHAVIORS



- Not engaging in their own services/ISP
 - Identification of barriers
 - Who else can assist?
- Name-calling/being rude/hostility/aggression
 - Radical compassion
 - Check our own response

Concrete behavioral strategies:

- Start with a positive...praise!
- Reflective listening
- Relaxation for self
- Take a break! Walk away.

What are all of the above modeling, long-term, for this parent?

AMANDA MITTEN, MA, LPC
AMANDA-MITTEN@OUHSC.EDU

HANNAH FRYE, MA, LPC
HANNAH-FRYE@OUHSC.EDU

