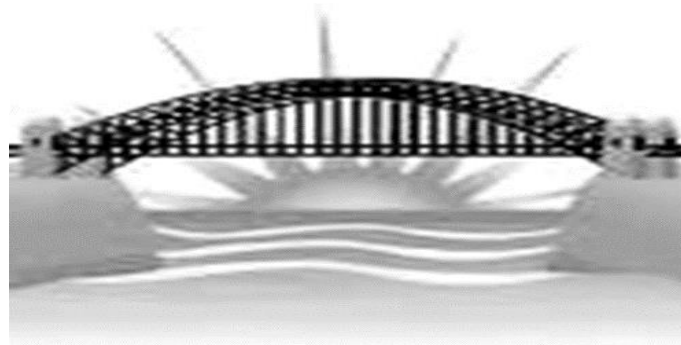


Bridging The Gap: Birth and Foster Families Working Together An Overview

**Chauncey Strong, MSW
Executive Director
Strong Training and Consulting, LLC**

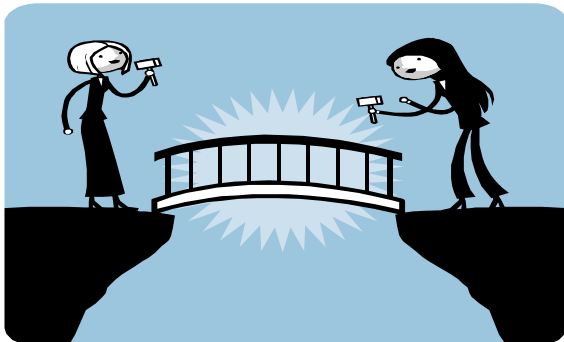
December 8, 2020



Bridging The Gap: Birth and Foster Families Working Together Objective

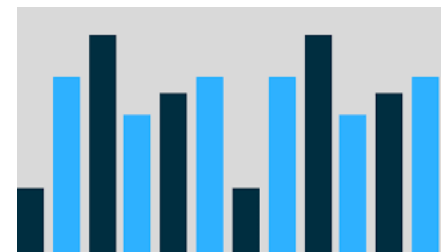
This interactive training highlights the exciting work in child welfare related to building and maintaining relationships and communication between birth parents and foster/adoptive parents.

The objective of this is workshop is to help foster parents better understand the importance of families working together, examines the benefits and challenges of these working relationships, and explore strategies to ensure these working relationships are successful.



Poll Questions

Have you heard Chauncey Strong speak/train?

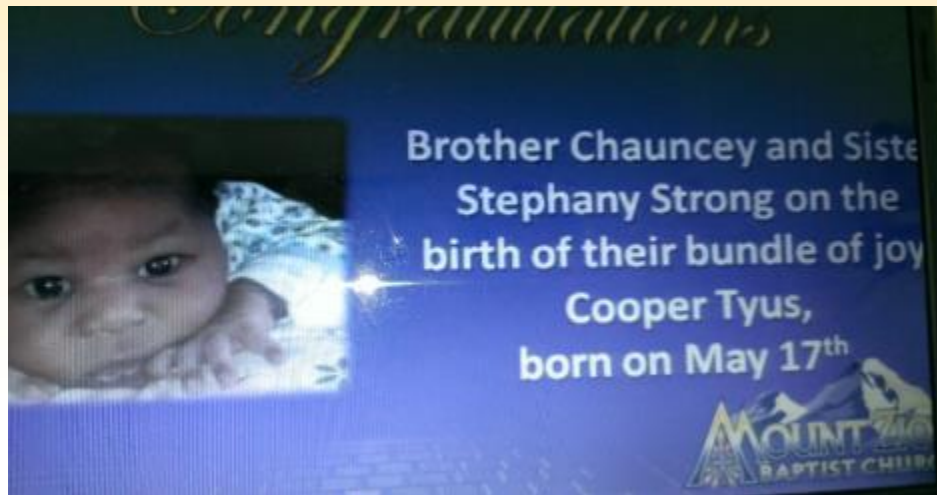




Speaker's Introduction Chauncey Strong

- Education
- Professional Experience

Cooper Tyus Strong



Cooper Tyus Strong
May 17, 2013 9:58 pm
7 lb. 15 oz. 20 in.

Participants Introduction



- Name and where do you live?
- How long have you been a foster parents and how many children?
- Share one brief positive experience you have working with a birth family.



Bridging The Gap: Birth and Foster Families Working Together

The Basics

- **What is the goal of foster care?**

- **What is Permanency?**

- Permanency should bring physical, legal and emotional safety and security within the context of a family relationship
- A safe, stable and secure parenting relationship
- Legal family membership status
- Love
- Unconditional commitment
- Permanency is lifelong!!!

Why is Permanency Important

The Basics

National stats for Alumni of foster care

- In 2017, approximately 20,000 aged out of foster care
- 1-in-5 was **homeless** approximately 20%.
- One-fifth of 26-year-olds **did not have a high school diploma** or GED; only 8 percent of these young adults had earned a postsecondary degree.
- 1 in 4 were involved in **the criminal justice system within 2 years** of leaving care.
- Nearly 80 percent of young women became **pregnant by age 26** (compared with 55 percent of young women in the general population).
- **The percentage of children who age out of the foster care system and still suffer from the direct effects of PTSD: 25%.**

Source: National Foster Youth Institute , NCSL



***Why might it be difficult for birth families
and foster families to work together?***

The myths we believe about Foster Parents

***Why might it be difficult for birth families
and foster families to work together?***

Myths about Birth Parents/Relative-

Bridging The Gap: Birth and Foster Families Working Together

Bridging the Gap



- *Bridging the Gap* is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between birth and foster families involved in a youth's life with the goal of supporting family reunification or another permanency plan.
- The BTG model process can also be used to maintain a positive relationship between the foster and adoptive families.

Bridging The Gap: Birth and Foster Families Working Together

Important Note

Bridging the Gap is.....

- a case to case, moment to moment decision made in *partnership* with the child's worker.
- Safety of the child and caregivers ARE NEVER COMPROMISED! Although we work with families who struggle with a variety of issues the impact of those issues on safety should be addressed and fully considered prior to initiating contact. Small steps should be taken when BTG is initiated.



Components of Bridging The Gap:

- ◆ BTG was an initiative started in Northern Virginia with the help consultation/support through National Resource for Permanency and Family Connections- Denise Goodman.
- ◆ collaboration of 4 public/10 private child placing agencies who serve the same clients
- ◆ self-driven and organized, Unified vision of best child welfare practice

Included: Training with staff and foster parents-On the Value and Benefits of the process

- ***Forms and evaluation -Roles and Responsibilities***
- ***Icebreaker Meeting***

Benefits and Challenges of Bridging the Gap

In the chat can you type one Benefit BTG



Bridging the Gap: Families Working
Together Chauncey Strong December 2020

Benefits and Challenges of Bridging the Gap

In the chat can you type one Challenge of BTG



Benefits of Bridging the Gap

Birth Parent/Relatives

- Anxiety reduced from knowing with whom the child is living.
- The opportunity to stay in contact with their child
- Bonding and attachment to child are preserved.

Child/Youth

- Reduced feelings of divided loyalties of two families
- Can reduce anxiety
- Opportunity to preserve sense of identity and history

Benefits of Bridging the Gap

Child's Worker

- Good communication and collaboration reduces tension
- Visitation runs more smoothly.
- Better communication makes your job easier.
- Good news to share in court



Benefits of Bridging the Gap

Resource Parents

- Foster parents have more accurate information to help them in caring for child.
- Can lessen the incidence of allegations against the foster parents
- Foster parent can serve as a mentor/role model for birth parent.
- Opportunity to maintain contact with child when they are no longer in your home.



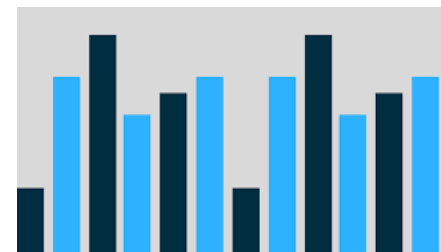
Strategies to Minimize the Challenges

- **Teamwork**
- **Build Relationship**
- **Set Ground Rules**
- **Collaborate with SW**
- **Icebreaker Meetings**



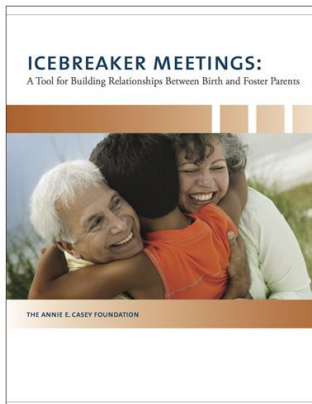
Poll Question

Have you ever facilitated or participated in an Icebreaker meeting? Yes or No



Icebreaker Meetings: A Tool for Building Relationships Between Birth and Foster Families

An icebreaker meeting is a facilitated, child focused meeting held shortly after a child is placed (or replaced) in out-of-home care to provide an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents (or other care givers) to meet each other and to share information about the needs of the child.



Icebreaker Meetings: An Overview

What to Expect

- An icebreaker meeting occurs **as soon as possible** after a child is taken into custody—generally, **within 2-7 work days** at a neutral location.
- The meeting also offers the **foster and birth parents/families** the opportunity **to see each other as adults** who share a **common concern** about the child.
- Parties involved should include **the birth family, the foster parent(s), public agency worker, private agency worker** (if involved), and the child (if appropriate).
- Lasts about 30 minutes** – This is **not** a TREATMENT TEAM MEETING



Icebreaker Meetings: An Overview

What to Expect

- The meeting is set up and facilitated usual by the child's worker or a designee of the agency using the standard agenda to keep the keeping the focus of the meeting on the child and his or her needs.
- The birth parent/family can provide information about the child's personality, likes and dislikes, routine, bedtime habits, allergies or medications, favorite toys, special activities, and academics.
- The foster parents can offer information about who else lives in the foster family, where the child will sleep, and regular activities in the foster home.
- Visitation and contact can be discussed
- An evaluation will also be completed by all parties at the end of the meeting



Icebreaker Meetings: An Overview

What is the Foster Parents Role in an Icebreaker

- The foster parents can offer information about their family.
 - Why did you become a foster parent
 - How many kids and families have you helped
 - Who else lives in the home
- Where will the child sleep
- What are the regular activities in the foster home, i.e., dinner time, bedtime, etc.?



Icebreaker Meetings: An Overview

What is the resource Parents Role in an Icebreaker

- Help prepare the child for the meeting and to process after the meeting
- Listen
- Preparation is key for a success Icebreakers?



What Happens After The Icebreaker

There are many ways foster parents can support parents and the parent-child relationship. Children in foster care benefit greatly when their resource parents are able to develop authentic co-parenting relationships with their parents. Below are some of the many ways foster parents can partner with and support birth families.

Continuum of Contact

Minimal Contact

- Have a positive view of the child's family
- Dress up the child for family time
- Exchange letters with child's family via caseworker
 - Send a note on how well the child is doing
- Request pictures of child's family to display in child's room

Supportive Contact

- Attend training to learn how to work directly with parents
- Have a non-threatening and non-judgmental attitude
- Talk with parents at family time

What Happens After The Icebreaker

Continuum of Contact

Mentoring Contact

- Invite child's family to attend school programs
- Give parents verbal progress reports
- Ask parents to come to appointments

Family Participation

- Attend parenting classes with parents
- Welcome parents into your home
- Include parents in farewell activities

Resources

Icebreaker Video:

www.aecf.org/icebreakers

The Toolkit

[Icebreaker Meetings Guide](#)

[Appendix 1: Icebreakers: Things to Consider Before or During Implementation](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 2: Sample grid of roles and responsibilities](#) (PDF)

Appendix 3: (3 files): Information forms for youth and parents:

[All About Me: Child](#) (DOC)

[All About Me: Teen](#) (DOC)

[All About My Child: Parent](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 4: Sample Meeting Summary Form](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 5: Sample Meeting Evaluation](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 6: Use of Birth Parents in Pre-Service Training](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 7: Use of Youth in Pre-Service Training](#) (DOC)

Appendix 8: Sample “Bridging the Gap” handouts (DOC)

[Handout for Foster Parent and Social Worker](#) (DOC)

[Handout for Birth Parent](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 9: Sample parent training outline](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 10: Icebreaker Web Resources and Training Materials](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 11: Tips for Youth Participating in Icebreakers](#) (DOC)

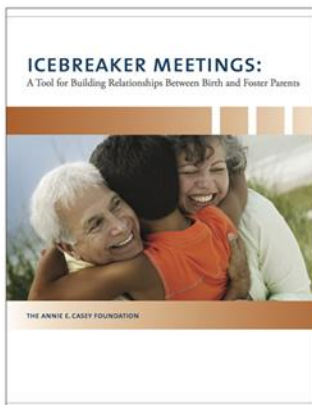
Appendix 12: 10 Tips for Supporting Youth During Icebreaker Meetings

[For Social Workers](#) (DOC)

[For Resource Parents](#) (DOC)

[For Birth Parents](#) (DOC)

[Appendix 13: Sample Icebreaker Meeting Brochure](#) (PDF)



Questions and Answers

- What additional questions do you have about Icebreakers?
- What additional information/support do you need to successfully implement an Icebreaker Meeting?
- What about the Icebreaker Meeting seems the most positive?
- What concerns do you have about Icebreaker Meetings?

Resources

Bridging the Gap Training curriculum adapted from materials developed by Denise Goodman, PhD

Bridging the Gap, definition and rationale

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/va-btg-definitionrationale.pdf

Bridging the Gap, icebreaker meeting protocol (2008),

<http://www.nccwe.org/toolkits/familyengagement/BTGIcebreakerProtocol4-21-08final.pdf>

Resources

Family Mosaic Discussion Guide and Video Series

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/family-mosaics/>

Foster Care: A Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/foster-care-webcast/>

National Foster Care Month

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/reallifestories/videos/>

Thank you for all you do for children and families



Strong Training and Consulting
Building **Strong** Families Together!

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