

F F T A



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Robertson, A. S. (2006). Including parents, foster parents and parenting caregivers in the assessments and interventions of young children placed in the foster care system. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 180–192.

Keywords

Childhood intervention, childhood assessment, foster care system

Research Questions

- What does current research tell us about the increasing numbers of children with special needs in the child welfare system?
- What is the current thinking about best practices and the role of parents in the assessment of young children (defined as children from birth to age 5)?
- What are the challenges of including parents in the assessment of young children in foster care?
- What recommendations will help social workers to incorporate best practices for the assessment of children in foster care?

Method

This paper is a review of information and literature about assessments of young children in the foster care system

Results/Findings

- (1) Research indicates that one in five children entering foster care is under 1 year old. Research also suggests that young children remain in foster care the longest. Many of these children have been exposed to poverty, substance abuse, and neglect during important developmental stages of their lives. Additionally, one fifth of children in foster care will experience at least three different placements. These disruptions in placement and unstable living conditions can undermine children's social, emotional, and physical development. Furthermore, over 50% of young children entering foster care exhibit serious health-related issues or developmental delays. Many of these health conditions or disabilities may have been prevented by appropriate parental support or access to early intervention.
- (2) Professionals disagree about what types of assessment are important for young children, how assessments should be administered, the role of parents in the assessment process, and how assessment outcomes may affect recommended interventions. Complicating these

issues is that much of the research on the assessment of young children has been completed with “normal” young children from intact families. Because of these issues, Zero to Three (a nonprofit organization focused on the healthy development of children from birth to age 3) collaborated with an interdisciplinary group of early childhood experts to develop guiding principles appropriate for the assessment of young children. These principles outline assessments and clarify practices that should be avoided. The majority of the principles address the importance of parents or trusted caregivers being involved in the assessment.

- (3) Although it is difficult to incorporate parents into assessment and intervention, research indicates the importance of family-centered practice and social networks for a child’s healthy development. Assessment should be a continuous process involving an integrative approach that allows for gathering concurrent information about a child. A key to this approach is engaging in interactions or interventions with the child and his or her caregivers in order to better understand the child’s functioning. Although family involvement is integral to the assessment process, the implementation of a successful model remains difficult. Professionals often have difficulty connecting with parents to arrange assessments and interventions for a variety of reasons, including cultural values, beliefs about child rearing and disabilities, education and socioeconomic status, knowledge about available services, parents’ experiences working with other educators or service providers, limited resources, access to services, and so on.
- (4) Child welfare social workers in the foster care system are often attempting to work with two different sets of parents simultaneously: biological parents and foster parents or parenting caregivers. For professionals working with this population, the assessment recommendations from Zero to Three present challenges, and little progress has been made within the foster care system to incorporate the recommended changes. Even though adhering to the best practices for the assessment of young children may be difficult, steps must be taken to implement a model that incorporates best practice. A more collaborative assessment model that includes time with parenting caregivers may be overwhelming for child welfare caseworkers and foster parents. However, research suggests that foster parents and parenting caregivers of young children may welcome more responsibility and increased parenting capacities. Research also suggests that when parents have access to additional information, resources, or training, they are better able to meet their children’s needs and advocate for them.

Limitations

This paper appears to be an appropriate review of the recent literature leading to recommendations regarding more accurate assessments of young children in foster care.

Application to Practice

Several recommendations for practice are provided:

- (1) Increase the number of qualified professionals who are able to perform early intervention assessments for foster children. Such an increase would involve integrating coursework with the social work, early special education, and family and child development fields.

- (2) Create child-friendly spaces within existing clinical settings where spontaneous play and interaction between the parent, foster parent, or the caregiver and the foster child could easily be observed, providing a foundation for the child's assessment.
- (3) Develop methods to increase the efficacy of parents and parenting caregivers as team members in their foster child's assessment and early education or interventions.
- (4) Develop meaningful communities of practice among child welfare professionals and early intervention programs that will increase the likelihood of uniformly implementing assessment principles.

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