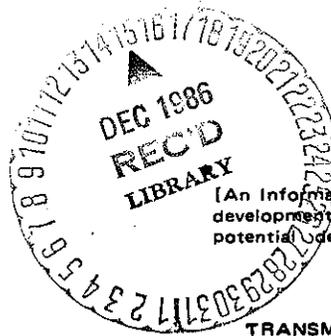


NEW YORK STATE
 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
 40 NORTH PEARL STREET, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12243
 CESAR A. PERALES
 Commissioner



[An Informational Letter informs local districts of potential developments in the Social Services field, or of actual or potential developments in collateral fields of interest.]

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

TRANSMITTAL NO.: 86 INF-43
 [Family and Children Services]

to: Commissioners of Social Services
 Executive Directors

DATE: December 12, 1986

SUBJECT: Permanency Practice Issue:
 Parental Involvement With Their Children
 and With The Supervising Agencies

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION:
 Social Services Districts
 Child Placement Agencies
 Child Welfare Supervisors
 Staff Development Coordinators

CONTACT PERSON: Any questions about this release should be directed to Fred Cantlo, Regional Director, Metropolitan Regional Office, telephone 212-488-3485; John O'Connor, Regional Director, Eastern Regional Office, telephone 518-473-1095; Karen Schimke, Regional Director, Buffalo Regional Office, telephone 716-847-3145; Frank Petrus, Regional Director, Western Regional Office, telephone 716-238-8200.

I. Purpose

There are two purposes to this letter. One is to emphasize the goal of keeping natural parents involved with their children in foster care when the permanency planning goal (PPG) is to reunite the children with their families.

The second purpose of this letter is to focus attention upon agency practices that support parental interest in remaining involved with the child and that facilitate constructive parental involvement with the agency.

FILING REFERENCES

Previous INFs/ADMs	Dept. Regs.	Social Services Law and Other Legal References	Bulletin/Chapter Reference	Miscellaneous References
86-INF-3	430.12(d) 431.16			

II. Background

The permanency planning movement that evolved during the past two decades, culminating in New York State's 1979 Child Welfare Reform Act, has led to a profound reorientation of agency practice. The reorientation has resulted in a distinct shift from highly concentrated child placement services to agency efforts in coordinating a wide range of community services that support and enhance family functioning and that have aimed at keeping families together.

When the placement of a child in foster care can not be prevented maintaining parental involvement with the child and establishing parental involvement with the agency is essential. Such practice represents a basic tenet of permanency planning. It is especially important if it is possible for the child to be reunited with the natural family or a close relative. The involvement of the parent is based upon three assumptions:

1. Regular contacts by agency workers with the natural parents makes it possible to establish an emotionally supportive relationship, to be able to assess regularly the family's psychosocial situation, and to facilitate the implementation of each phase-related task of a child's service plan.
2. Communication and working relationships with natural parents and family members supports and promotes family efforts to maintain a viable family structure as well as reducing the child's feeling of stress over the separation from the family.
3. Working relationships are possible when parents feel from the time of initial contact with the agency that their parental role is respected and valued; it is how persons feel that will determine in a considerable measure what they think, how they act, and what use they make of agency service.

III. Program Implications

Agency experience has demonstrated that, in general, parental involvement promotes a level of communication that is essential for developing and effectively implementing permanency plans. The stress some children may feel from being in placement is often reduced by parental involvement as it enables them to maintain a self-image of adequacy rather than of rejection as well as to feel hopeful about their future. For parents staying involved with their children and becoming involved with the agency is indispensable to the process of defining a positive role for themselves during each phase of their child's placement.

Remaining involved with an agency throughout the period of a child's placement may make it possible for natural parents to obtain agency assistance when community services are needed to strengthen family functioning and to prepare for the return of the child. Such assistance is important for the stress of reunification is known to evoke adjustments and reactions from both parents and children. To avoid problems parents and children often need community services that can strengthen an individual's or a family's adaptive capacity by new skills and additional resources, by improved communication, and by the resolution of interpersonal conflicts.

IV. Recommended Agency Practices That Support Parent Involvement

- A. Initial contact. Enable natural parents at the time of initial contact with the agency to understand the basic policies, program, authority, and objectives of the agency. In addition, the agency's interest in doing what it can to strengthen family life should be made clear as well as the agency's readiness to avoid, if possible, the placement of the child, and if placement is necessary, to keep the length of time the child is in care to a minimum.
- B. Preparing the Child for Placement. When circumstances permit, assist natural parents in understanding their responsibility for preparing their children for placement. Such preparation by parents should aim to help their children to realize that to be in foster care is, at that particular time, the best possible arrangement for their care, and also, to know that being separated from their family was not their fault.
- C. Support and Guidance. Provide parents reasonable support and guidance to help them in their efforts to stabilize their situation so that their child may be returned home.
- D. Service Plan Review. Facilitate natural parent participation in service plan reviews with preparations that includes the orientation of the parents to the service plan review process. The natural parent should understand that the service plan review is a meeting with overlapping phases of fact finding, information giving, problem solving, and decision making. Parent readiness for the meeting will be enhanced by understanding the purpose and scope of the meeting, the role and responsibility of each participant, what to expect from other participants, and what others may expect from them.
- E. Continued Parental Contact. Keep track of natural parents to prevent them from losing contact with the agency.

Note: See Appendix A - On going Casework Services.

- F. Use of Community Resources. Explore available community resources that may be helpful to the family in meeting their needs and assist the family to make use of the resources.
- G. Parent Appointment. Follow up on all appointments that the parents made. These include appointments with the worker, foster parents, or another agency.
- H. Discharge Planning. Prepare the parent and members of the family for the discharge of the child to the home by helping the family to represent a support system for the child.
- I. Parent-Child Visiting. Assist parents in planning visits with their children and in strengthening their relationship with their children by visits that satisfies the child's need for parental affection, attention, and approval and the parents' need to feel competent and useful to the child.

NOTE: For additional information on parental visiting refer to 86-INF-3, issued April 30, 1986.

V. Additional Information

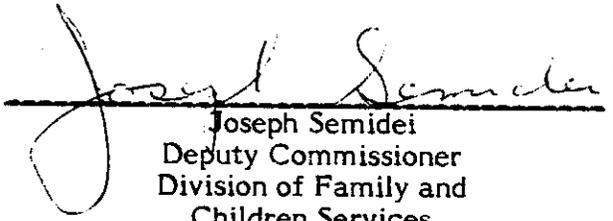
- A. A source of useful information regarding parental involvement is a book that the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) published in 1985. It is entitled Establishing Parent Involvement in Foster Care Agencies. The book may be borrowed from the Department's Material Resource Center, One Commerce Plaza, Room 725, Albany, New York 12260 or purchased from CWLA, 67 Irving Place, New York, New York 10003.
- B. Some agencies have group meetings for parents to orient them to their expected roles while their children are in placement. The September/October 1982 issue of Child Welfare has an article describing the pilot phase of an innovative program that used a group format to orient parents to their expected roles and to educate and support them on the process of deciding their children's future. The article is entitled Group Orientation for Parents of Children in Foster Care. Another source of information on the use of the group method is the special October, 1972 issue of Child Welfare. A bibliography, Group Process and Techniques, may be borrowed from the Department's Material Resource Center. The bibliography was developed in 1980 at the Regional Education Center of SUNY Brockport in connection with a workshop on group techniques in Permanency Planning.
- C. Appendix B, The Foster Care Worker's Self-Assessment Questionnaire, is intended for use by caseworkers seeking to acquire or improve some of the skills that are needed in working with parents. Most of the statements in the questionnaire are concerned with the development of a professional worker-parent relationship. It is this relationship that is the key to involving parents constructively with an agency and with the child in the care of an agency.

The confidence and purposefulness of beginning workers in foster care programs are promoted by their understanding of the importance of the relationship for effective communication, planning, and decision making. New workers have to be aware of the fact that parents who feel accepted and respected by the agency worker will be better able to tolerate some of the strain they feel as non-caretaking parents. A positive relationship with an agency worker help parents to maintain a sense of identity and a self-image of adequacy. All workers should keep in mind that they can be a positive and stimulating force for change in a problem situation of a parent or family. A positive relationship gives many parents an unusual feeling of security; it can help to generate the energy a parent can use in problem solving activity; it can help to bring about a new constellation of emotional needs through a discussion of emotional concerns and by a reorientation to an interpersonal conflict or to a perspective on a problem.

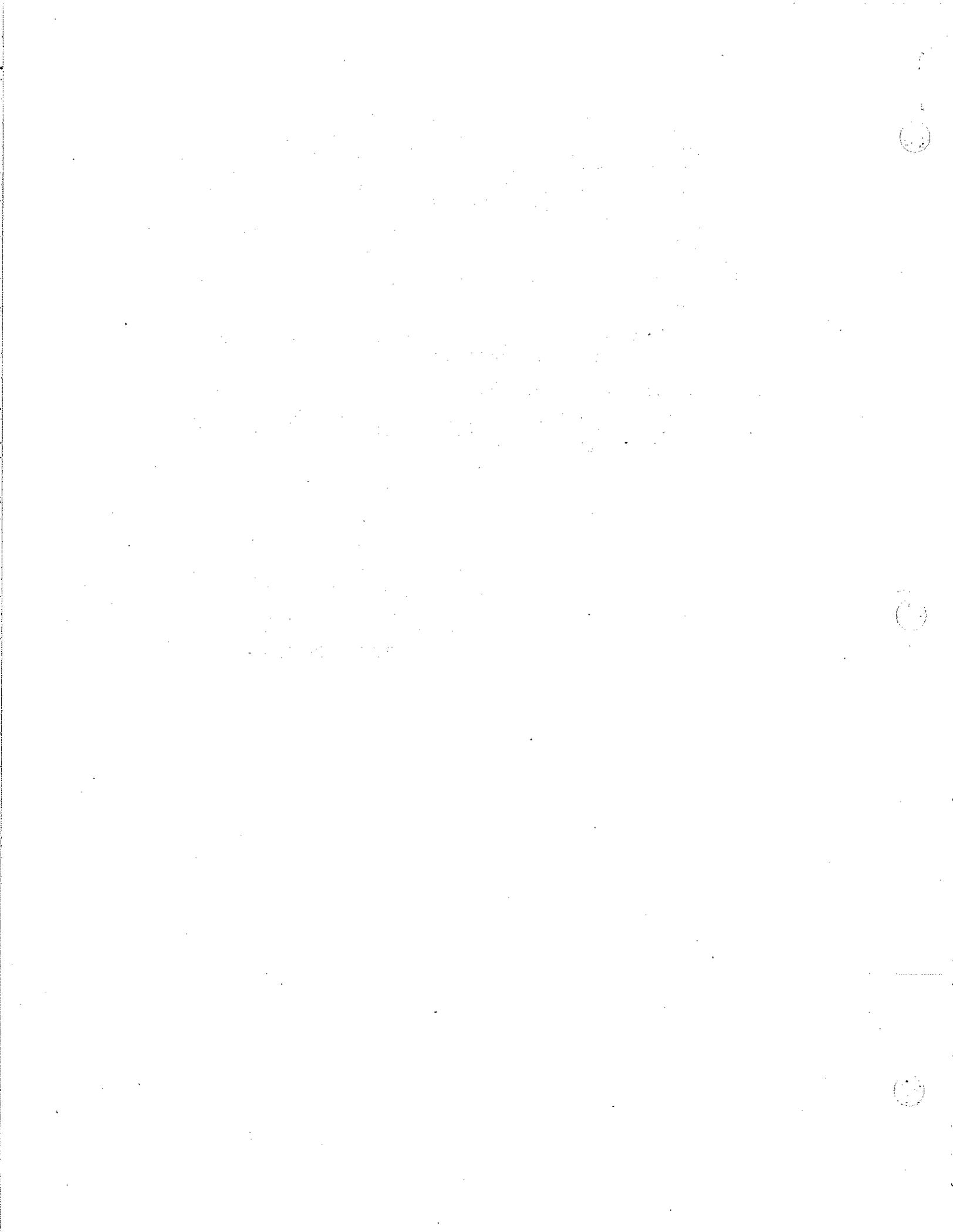
A positive relationship, for example, makes it possible to assist parents in preparing for visits with their children. Some parents

need the worker's reassurance about the appropriateness of their plan for a visit. Others may have a need to engage the worker in a logical discussion about what to anticipate during a visit. Sometimes a parent will have to be confronted over the use of stereotyped patterns of thinking and behaving, such as scoldings, nagging, teasing, etc. that have been destructive in the past to the parent-child relationship. The stronger the relationship the more likely the confrontation will be effective.

- D. Technical assistance may be obtained from the Department's regional offices with regard to:
1. Assessing the effectiveness of current agency practice at involving parents with the agency.
 2. Developing in-service training programs with aims that include improving worker practice at involving parents with the agency, at developing family support systems, and at strengthening parent-child relationship.



Joseph Semidei
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Family and
Children Services



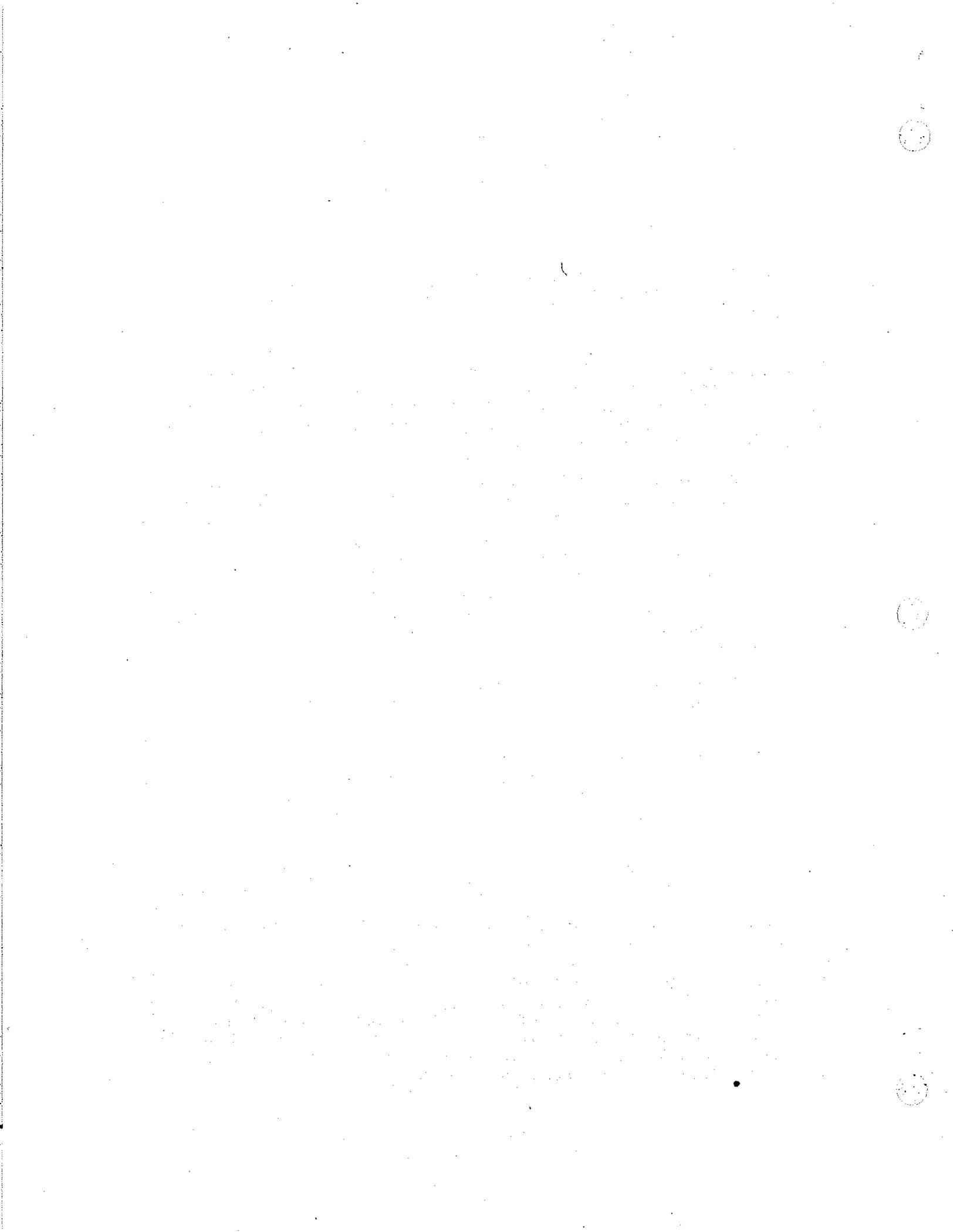
Appendix A

On-Going Casework Services

(The following is an excerpt from Permanent Planning Handbook: Case Management in Social Services published by the Virginia Department of Social Services.)

For any plan to be successful, it is necessary for both you and the parents to stay actively involved. The demands on your time are enormous and it may be difficult to keep parents from getting discouraged or becoming disinterested when things do not happen right away. To help prevent the plan for returning the child from falling apart, keep in mind the following techniques:

1. Provide reasonable support to the parents to help them in their efforts to stabilize their situation and have their child returned. It is often difficult to decide how much you as the worker should do, and how much should be left up to the parents' own initiative. This decision should be based on your knowledge of the parents' capability, resourcefulness and sophistication. The less capable the parent, the more help s/he will need arranging appointments, transportation, etc. However, it is unrealistic to provide prolonged, massive support to a family before the child can be returned home because this probably means the family will need even more support after the child is returned.
2. Modify the plan when necessary and reasonable to help the parents achieve their goals. The parents will have to be reminded that the child cannot wait forever.
3. Keep track of the parents to prevent the parents from losing contact with the agency. You may have to make frequent trips to their home, leave messages with friends or neighbors, call other relatives, etc., but this kind of effort will prove that the agency made every effort to provide services and support the parents.
4. Investigate and use all available community resources that may be helpful in meeting the needs of the child and his/her parents to promote reunification. If you are a worker in a rural agency, you may not have a wealth of available resources, but you may know of informal helping systems that will help to compensate for the lack of organized community resources.
5. Follow up on all appointments made with the parents, whether the appointment was with you, the foster parents, or another agency. Getting immediate feedback can provide insight into progress or problems so that support can be given the parents (for following through with a clinic appointment, for example), or issues can be dealt with as they occur, if the parents fail to keep a scheduled appointment.



Appendix B

The Foster Care Worker's Self-Assessment Questionnaire:
Developing Worker-Parent Relationships/Facilitating
Parental Involvement with their Children
and the Supervising Agency

Purpose: The purpose of the questionnaire is to help foster care workers in their effort to improve professional skills and to acquire the knowledge and insights that will make their work assignments more interesting. The questionnaire may be used by foster care workers in making a self-assessment of their skills and abilities in developing relationships with parents and in facilitating parental involvement with their children and the agency. Although a worker completed self-assessment form may be shared with a supervisor, it is not intended to be a supervisory tool but primarily a means of encouraging foster care caseworkers to make a self-assessment of the service they provide a routine professional practice.

Instructions: After carefully reviewing each statement the foster care worker may rate his/her performance in terms of his/her own definition of effectiveness and effort by circling one of the numbers from the scale on the right hand margin. The highest rating is 1 (one) which means effectiveness and effort has been outstanding. A rating of 2 (two) means effectiveness and effort has been above average. A rating of 3 (three) means effectiveness and effort is average. A rating of 4 (four) means effectiveness and effort needs improvement. When completed add all the ratings and divide the sum by 15 to obtain an average rating.

- | | <u>Rating Scale</u> |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. The services I provide reflect my sensitivity: | |
| a. To the distress some parents feel from what they perceive as a loss of opportunities to behave as parents after their children enter foster care: | 1 2 3 4 |
| b. To the need some parents have for defenses, such as withdrawal, rationalizations, projections, when they are anxious about their inability to care for their children. | 1 2 3 4 |
| c. To the problems and conflicts some parents have about the agency's authority and power to control some aspects of the family's life. | 1 2 3 4 |
| d. To parental attitudes, values, and feelings that are likely to affect the child's sense of well being and the family's capacity to serve as a support system after discharge. | 1 2 3 4 |
| e. To parental need for reassurance and the opportunity at times of stress to ventilate their concerns about the care of their child, the authority of the agency, foster parents, etc. | 1 2 3 4 |

2. My practice reflects a capacity:

Rating Scale

a. To empathize with parents, to understand their problems in living, to identify their strengths and resources, and to support the use of their strengths and resources in making changes in the family's environment and social functioning.

1 2 3 4

b. To respond appropriately and professionally to parent provocation and/or hostility.

1 2 3 4

c. To render assistance when it is indicated to parents in surmounting the impersonal bureaucratic barriers to needed community services.

1 2 3 4

d. To provide parents with emotional support that protects their feelings of self worth and prevents them from overreacting when they feel lonely or to disturbed feelings associated with their child's placement.

1 2 3 4

e. To assess accurately the family's capacity to serve as a support system to the child prior to a home visit or to being discharged.

1 2 3 4

3. I consistently make an effort:

a. To help parents to perceive correctly the aim of agency intervention and to recognize that agency service is in the best interests of the family as well as the child.

1 2 3 4

b. To assist parents to understand their child's placement related concerns and to recognize how parental visits contribute to a child's sense of well being and lead to a reduction in the length of time a child may have to remain in foster care.

1 2 3 4

c. To orient parents in a planful and thoughtful way to the responsibility of the agency and to their role in making it possible for the child to be returned to their care.

1 2 3 4

d. To prepare parents for their participation in service plan reviews by helping them to understand what to expect from others, what others will be expecting of them, and what power parents have in influencing agency planning and decision making.

1 2 3 4

e. To follow up on all appointments that parents make with their children, foster parents, etc. and to provide parents, who may need it, with stimulation, guidance, and encouragement to remain active at problem solving activities which are difficult or frustrating.

1 2 3 4