

National Quality Improvement Center

QIC•AG

Adoption & Guardianship
Support and Preservation

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Department of Health and Human Services,
Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau in partnership with:
Spaulding for Children
The University of Texas at Austin,
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Updated
December 2016

ALL SITE QUARTERLY MEETING

- Welcome
- Roll call
- Review of agenda
- Learning opportunity will be recorded
- Questions will be taken at the end of the presentations
- Survey at conclusion of webinar

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Siblings: A Life Long Connection



PRESENTERS

- Dr. Avidan Milevsky
Associate Professor
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
- Karyn Schimmels
Northwest Program Director
Camp to Belong
- April M. Curtis
Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice
Consultant
Co-Founder, Foster Care Alumni of America

QIC-AG Site Quarterly Learning Opportunity Siblings: A Life Long Connection

Research Regarding Sibling Bonds

Avidan Milevsky, Ph.D., LCPC



*Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
and
Wellspring Counseling, Baltimore, MD*

Overview of Presentation

- Significance of sibling bonds throughout life
- Impact of foster care/adoption on sibling bonds
- Prominent therapeutic issues related to siblings when working with adoptive families and adoptees
- Questions



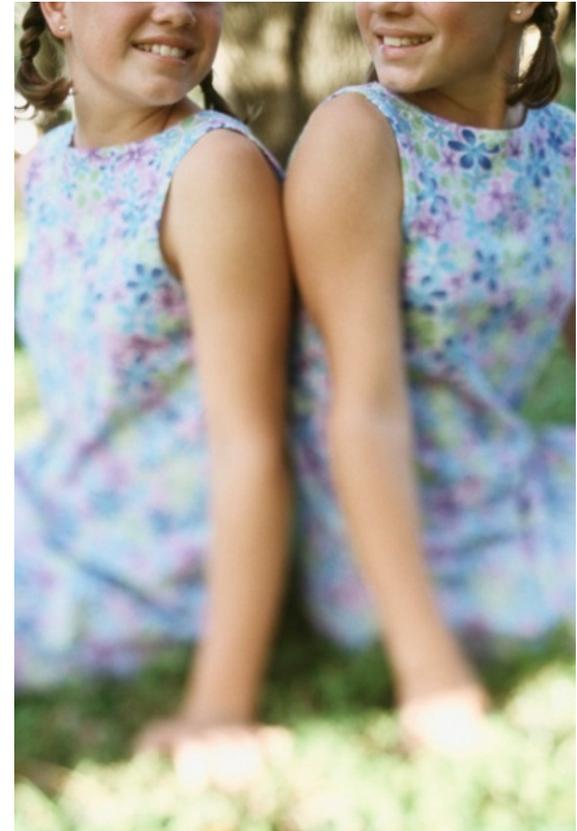
The Integral Role of Siblings

- Over 90% of Americans have a sibling.
- Most long-lasting relationship.
- Recent scientific focus in both developmental and clinical literature.



The Positive Outcomes

- Siblings assist in socializing, interpreting, identification, differentiation, social regulation, physical support, and join with each other in dealing with parents through coalitions.



The Positive Outcomes

- Sibling closeness in childhood linked with emotional/social understanding, cognitive abilities, and adjustment.
- During adolescence sibling closeness contributes to healthy identity formation and minimization of teen problems.



The Positive Outcomes

- In both childhood and adolescence siblings may serve as a buffer for those experiencing ecological risk, family distress, living in single-parent homes, and those placed in foster-homes.
- In adulthood, sibling warmth is linked with well-being and successful aging.



The Forgotten Relationship

- Literature is extremely limited on the sibling dynamic in general.
- More research is available on the mother-in-law relationship than on the sibling bond?!?
- Little attention has been given to broader sibling issues in therapy and in other sectors as well such as social services and family law.



Sibling Issues in Law

“Hardly a week goes by that I’m not presented with a proposed parenting plan that separates siblings.”

—Judge Anne Kass

Family Law: Adoption

- Only “reasonable effort” needs to be made to place siblings together when the children are up for adoption together.
- When separately placed siblings seek post-adoption contact and the adoptive parent objects, it may be unconstitutional to force contact under the Supreme Court’s opinion in *Troxel v. Granville*.
- In this case the court held that a Washington state statute authorizing courts to “order visitation rights for any person when visitation may serve the best interest of the child” was “an unconstitutional infringement on [the mother’s] fundamental right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of her two daughters.”

Youngblood sibling visitation legislation subject of House Children and Youth Committee hearing

HARRISBURG, Nov. 12 – The House Children and Youth Committee today heard testimony from legal, judicial and academic experts on the importance of sibling relationships, in a public hearing on [H.B. 642](#) authored by state Rep. Rosita C. Youngblood, D-Phila.

Youngblood’s legislation seeks to recognize the importance of sibling relationships on the emotional and psychological development of children, and would strengthen those bonds by putting sibling visitation rights on par with those currently available to grandparents. "It is important that we recognize the importance of these relationships, and simply allow siblings who may be separated from their brother or sister -- as a result of divorce, or death of a parent -- to have an opportunity to go before a judge and seek visitation rights," Youngblood said.

Dr. Avidan Milevsky -- a noted author and lecturer, who is an associate professor of psychology at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania and a psychotherapist at Wellspring Counseling in Towson, Md. – said the importance of siblings at all stages of life is becoming more evident through research. "Legislation to allow for siblings to seek partial custody or visitation when appropriate is a natural extension of the overwhelming scientific evidence highlighting the critical and unmatched role played by siblings throughout life," Milevsky said.

Other testifiers included J. Paul Helvy, a family law attorney and partner with the McNees, Wallace and Nurick LLC, law firm; and Judge Carol Van Horn of the Court of Common Pleas in Franklin and Fulton counties.

**Impact of Foster
Care/Adoption on
Sibling Bonds and
Prominent
Therapeutic Issues**

Compensatory Support

- Focus on biological sibling
- Objective is to create a sibling bond to serve as a compensation for family dissolution.
- Children have little voice in these situations even though they often will be the most affected by it.
- Depending on sibling support holds considerable therapeutic potential.



Compensatory Support

- Siblings represent the “unit of continuity” in a chaotic world.
- Siblings serve as the bridge between the family of origin and the reconstituted family.
- Siblings can also help with preserving family memories as an “anchor to the past.”
- Sibling work can assist in the attachment of the children with the adoptive family as well.



Therapeutic Process

- Use of classic child therapy techniques such as play and art can minimize tensions.
- It may also help with children usually too old for play considering how siblings often play well together even when they are at different developmental stages.
- Play often recreates the life situation producing a critical turning point when children realize that their verbal limitations in emotional expression could be "played" out.
- This can help the siblings move from joint sibling play about the situation to joint discussions about it.

Therapeutic Process

- Sibling therapy serves as a protected space to explore and express emotions regarding parental neglect, abandonment, fear, guilt, displaced anger at each other, etc.
- Identify the shared situational and emotional fate.
- Move from rage to acceptance of each other and healing together.
- Discuss the changes in their life and share their ideas about the future.

“Did you want
to hit me
when Mommy
made you?”

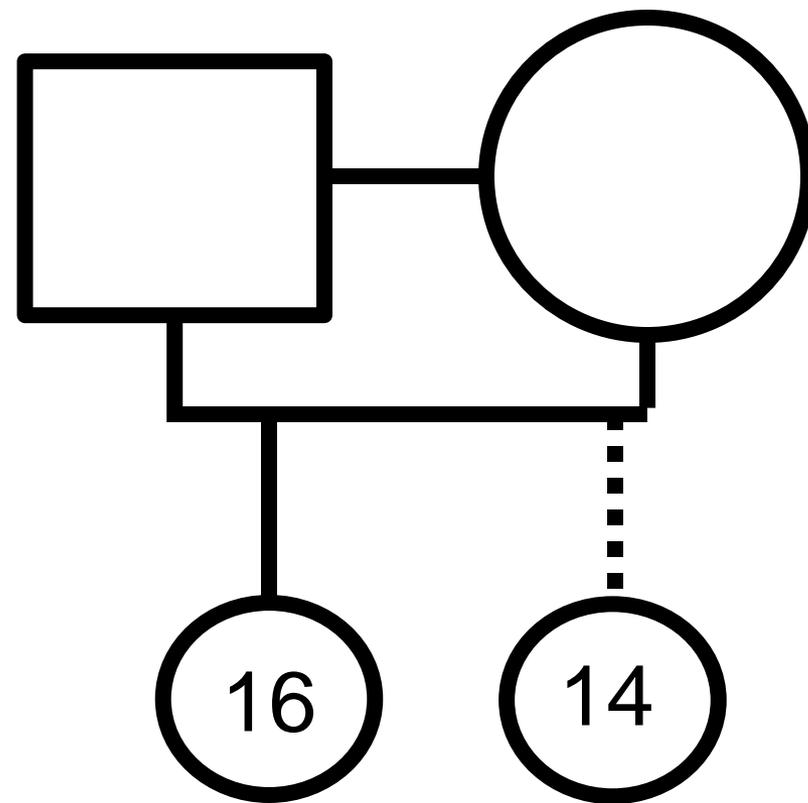
“Why did you
laugh
when Mommy
cut me?”

Therapeutic Goals

- Goal is not full recovery, rather forming a foundation of support.
- Therapist may trigger intense transference on behalf of siblings (i.e. Father's day card).
- Caution should be taken not to become a surrogate parent.
- Therapy goal should be for siblings to depend less on the therapist and support each other.
- In some cases goal may be developing a healthy balance between sibling support and individuation.
- Siblings may need to abandon a caretaking role for a healthy balance of support and rivalry.

- Zoe (14), adopted at birth with sister Maya (16), experiencing behavioral disturbances. Zoe's biological mother resurfaced and offered to take Zoe back. Reluctant, adoptive parents agreed to transfer custody back to the biological mother. Maya in therapy for aggressive sibling bond, profound sense of loss, and fear that biological mother will be a bad influence.

Sibling therapy served to explore displaced anger of Zoe towards Maya about neglect and abandonment felt towards parents. Sisters were able to identify with the shared emotions and move from anger to support. Sisters wanted to end with a departure ceremony where sisters wrote an amalgamated safe journey prayer focused on Zoe's "journey" with her biological family. The ceremony and prayer were conducted in-session with the siblings and therapist. Maya recited the traveler's prayer. The experience was profoundly moving for the sisters and Maya reported in a follow-up session that the experience was a turning point in her acceptance of her sister moving away from home.



Review of Presentation

- Significance of sibling bonds throughout life
- Neglect of sibling issues in many arenas
- Sibling work can assist in adjustment and in the attachment of the children with the adoptive family as well



Sibling Issues in Therapy

Research and Practice with
Children, Adolescents and Adults

AVIDAN MILEVSKY





Avidan Milevsky, Ph.D.

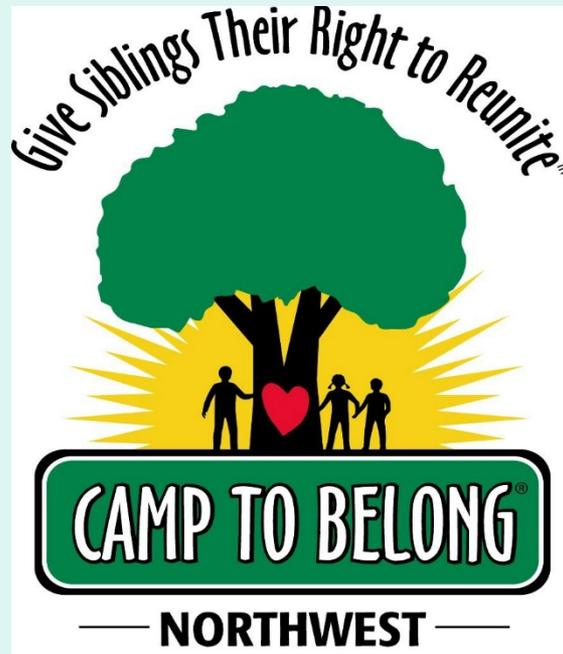
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THE HUFFINGTON POST



Camp to Belong Overview

Importance of families and siblings

- In 1997 the Adoption and Safe Family Act was passed which required states to make progress in the area of siblings in foster care and placement with siblings.
- ***The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351)***, with stronger guidelines was passed and offers new support to many children who are being raised by grandparents and other relatives and seeks to make major strides in **family preservation, including siblings**.
- This legislation requires states to preserve the sibling bond for children by making reasonable efforts to place siblings together when they must be removed from their parents' home, provided it is in the children's best interests. In the case of siblings not placed together, states must make reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction, unless such interaction would be harmful to any of the siblings

What we know to be true

- Sibling relationships are among the longest, most enduring family bonds.
- Placement into substitute care for children disrupts family bonds and relational continuity.
- This problem is particularly true for children who in addition to being removed from their adult caregivers, and also experience separation from their siblings.
- For siblings separated through foster care or adoptive placements, research has shown that this separation can lead children to profound feelings of grief and loss, negativity impacts important socio-emotional developmental processes, increases the likelihood of behavioral and mental health problems, and can lead to placement instability.
- Within the field of child welfare, there is an increasing awareness of the protective potential of siblings, yet few programs and interventions are available that specifically target the sibling relationship.

Overview of national data



Values and practices to consider

- Family studies have side stepped many sibling questions for decades, focusing heavily on the parent child-bonds.
- Over the past several years psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and even biologists have begun studying brothers and sisters as never before and teasing apart the genetic, sociological, and psychological threads of sibling relationships.
- In child welfare, much has been learned about the relationship between the coplacement of siblings and placement stability and permanency outcomes.
- Processes in place within sibling groups such as sibling visits and regular contact is an intervention that benefits siblings and does promote beneficial outcomes.
- Retaining sibling ties can help children/youth maintain their culture, family traditions, shared history, connectedness, identity, and a sense of belonging.
- Often, it can provide them with a better understanding of their roots, and brings a sense of peace when they know that their siblings are safe.
- Maintaining sibling bonds should be addressed prior to movement to permanency and included in post-permanency planning and supports.

Siblings: *In most societies throughout the world, siblings usually grow up together and spend a good deal of their childhood with each other, like playing and having fun. This genetic and physical closeness may be marked by the development of strong [emotional bond](#) such as [love](#) or [enmity](#). The emotional bond between siblings is often complicated and is influenced by factors such as parental treatment, [birth order](#), [personality](#), and personal experiences outside the family.*

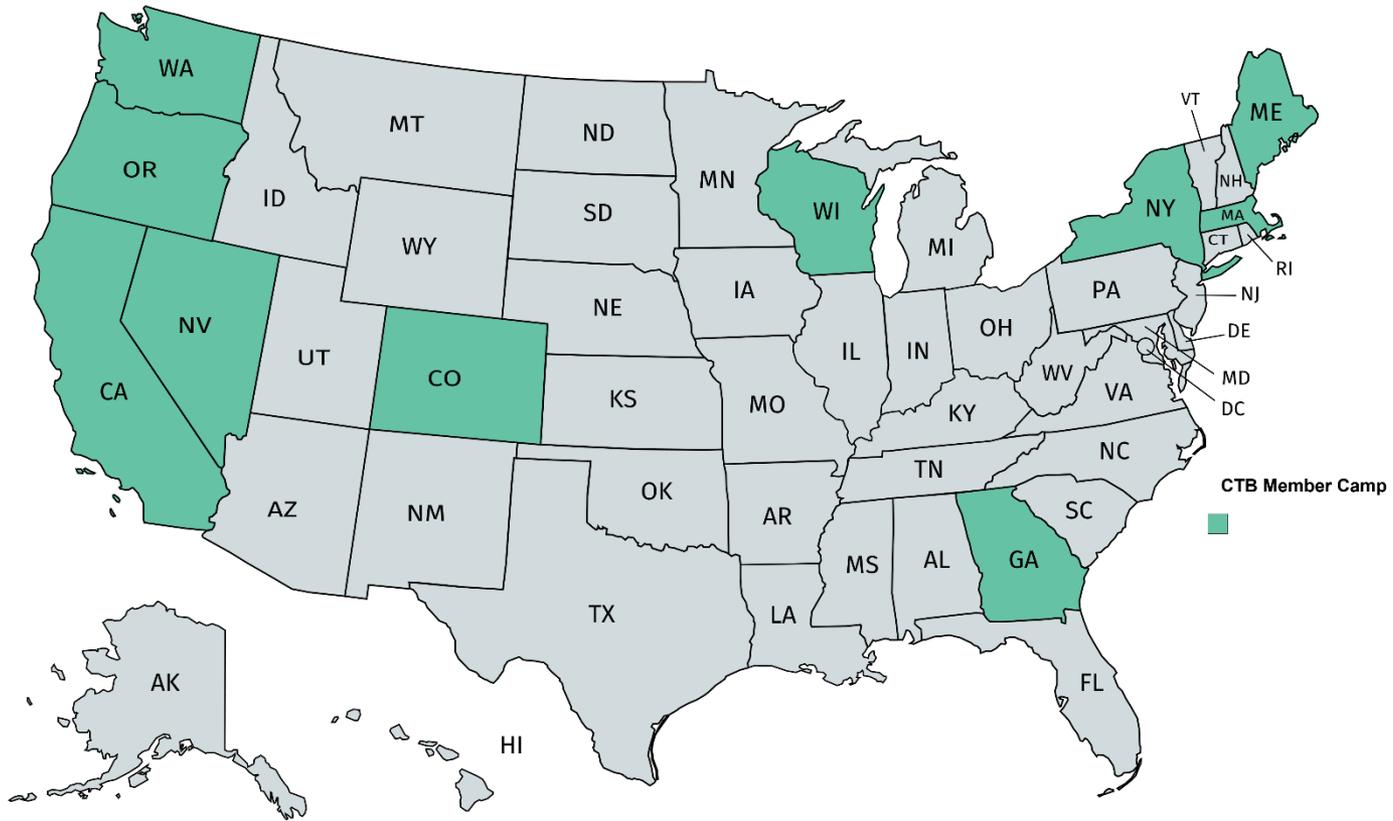
Let me Introduce you to a resource that can impact this bond, relationship and emotional connectedness –

Camp-to-Belong

Camp To Belong

- CAMP TO BELONG, (CTB), an international non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization, has been actively reuniting brothers and sisters placed in separate foster, adoptive or kinship homes through Summer Camp Programs and year round events since 1995.
- Siblings may not have the opportunity to read bedtime stories together at night, have breakfast together, cheer for each other at school functions or share precious holidays – all the things that typical siblings get to do each day.
- Siblings are often taken for granted. Yet, the sibling relationship can be our longest relationship in life.
- Our primary goal is to provide a sense of belonging to youth as individuals, and as siblings, giving them opportunities to share childhood memories together and among other youth in the same situations.

Camp To Belong sibling programs in the USA



In 2016.....

- 10 member camps in the USA served over **850** siblings separated from each other through Camp To Belong summer camp programs
- Over **400** siblings in two member camps also enjoyed several shorter one day sibling enhancement visits and activities throughout the year
- There were 350 volunteer counselors nationwide who dedicated their time to this effort= over 40,000 volunteer hours
- There were 400 day volunteers that donated time
- There were over 300 birthday cakes made and presented to siblings during their summer camp program
- There were 750 pillows and quilts donated to siblings at camp made by caring and dedicated volunteers
- There were over 10,000 pictures printed for siblings to create creative memory photo albums to take home with them to keep and be reminded of precious memories together

Camp To Belong is a positive sibling intervention tool that works

- CTB is committed to rigorous and ongoing evaluation of its programs. Towards that effort, campers receive surveys prior to and following participation in our programs.
- Evaluation results demonstrate that this experience is most effective in reducing sibling conflict, and helped siblings advocate for more contact with their siblings.

Highlights pulled from 456 evaluation surveys conducted before and after camp:

- 87% of siblings responded that spending time at CTB helped them know that they can count on their siblings.
- 91% responded that they have special memories of the time they spent with siblings at camp

Evaluation results continued

- 72% reported that the camp experience helped them understand more about themselves, gave them a chance to get to know other youth whose lives were similar to their own, and made them feel more hopeful about their future.
- 85% responded that they liked being with their siblings and having them around.
- 52% reported that they see their siblings only one time per month
- 24% reported that they only visit 1-4 times per year
- 6% reported that CTB was the only time they have visited with their siblings in the past year

Learn more

- About Camp to Belong
 - www.camptobelongoregon.org
 - <http://www.camptobelong.org/>
- About Siblings Practice in Child Welfare
 - <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/>
 - http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/sibling_overview.pdf
 - http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/cwla_article_siblings.pdf
 - http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/policy-issues/Sibling_Placement_Policies.pdf



To the outside world
We all grow old.
But not to brothers and sisters.
We know each other
as we always were.
We know each other's hearts.
We share private family jokes.
We remember family feuds
and secrets, family griefs and joys.
We live outside the touch of time.
~ Clara Ortega





RECOGNIZING THE RIGHT OF SIBLING ASSOCIATION PRE AND POST PERMANENCE

April M. Curtis

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Consultant
Co-Founder, Foster Care Alumni of America

Overview

- Common child welfare practices related to siblings
- Example of a state that made changes to rights of siblings
 - Overview of landscape prior to the Joint Resolution
 - Impetus for making changes related to sibling visitation
 - Joint resolution
 - Overview of legislation related to sibling visitation
- What other sites can learn from Illinois

Overview of IL Sibling Right Law

- **Public Act 97-1076: Key DCFS Responsibilities**
- **Training & Best Practices Considerations in Implementing P.A. 97-1076**
- (Identified Through DCFS/FCAN Roundtable Subcommittee Meetings and Presented to the DCFS/FCAN Roundtable on August 25, 2011)
- **Foster Home Licensing/Approval**
 - Prospective foster parents should be asked about intentions and attitudes regarding post-permanency contact during the foster home licensing process. The licensing worker should assess and document the family's willingness and ability to support ongoing sibling connections.
 - DCFS should develop a mandatory training to inform foster parents about the significance of sibling connections, address their concerns regarding ongoing contact, and encourage their involvement in planning and executing sibling visits.
- **Caseworker Development & Training**
 - Foundation training should include a module on:
 - the significance of sibling connections both while siblings are in care and post-permanency;
 - how to address foster parent concerns regarding ongoing contact; and
 - how to encourage foster parent involvement in sibling visit planning and execution.
- **Placement of a Child Into a Specific Home**
 - Develop practice to promote placement of children entering care with the parents of adopted siblings, provided the adoptive parents are willing and it is in the child's best interest.
 - When a specific home is being considered for placement for a specific child, individual needs of the child related to sibling contact pre- and post-permanency and the caretaker's willingness and ability to foster sibling relationships should be explored.
- **Post-Permanency Agreements**
 - These agreements should be incorporated into the adoption order and into the subsidy checklist.
 - DCFS can conduct an annual review of cases where there is a post-adoption sibling contact agreement. Where problems are identified, the Department can offer a team decision-making meeting to address concerns, and if necessary, modify agreements.
- **Data**
 - A data link should be established in DCFS that allows for new children coming into care to be linked with any siblings already in foster or adoptive placements.
 - A data link should be established to track common birth fathers among sibling groups.

- Recognizes the importance of sibling relationships for youth who have entered the child welfare system.
- Requires DCFS to consider the development and preservation of sibling relationships whenever a child enters care or requires a new placement.
- Encompasses sibling relationships regardless of whether the parent's parental rights were terminated, and after adoption or private guardianship.
- Includes children and siblings in DCFS care, those who were in DCFS care prior to adoption, and those who are aging or have aged out of care.

Statutory Deadlines for Implementation*

- ✓ Effective date of law: August 24, 2012
- ✓ Development of form for youth entering & exiting care, explaining their rights & responsibilities related to sibling visitation: Required, but no deadline given in law.
- ✓ Former DCFS youth in care age 18 to 21 who have been adopted may access Illinois Adoption Registry services if they seek contact with siblings: Effective August 24, 2012.
- ✓ Development of registry database for placement of identified siblings: January 1, 2013.
- ✓ Placement information on siblings who are adopted or in private guardianship must be readily available to DCFS and private agency caseworkers responsible for placement.
- ✓ When a child is adopted or placed in private guardianship from foster care, DCFS must inform adoptive parents/guardians that they may be contacted in the future regarding placement of, or contact with, other siblings.
- ✓ Promulgation of rules addressing preservation of sibling relationships: January 1, 2013.
Rules must address:
 - ✓ Recruitment, licensing & support of foster parents willing and capable of fostering sibling groups or supporting contact for siblings placed apart. Must include training for foster parents, licensing workers, placement workers, and others as necessary.
 - ✓ Promoting placements that help develop & maintain contact with siblings placed apart.
 - ✓ State-supported guidance regarding sibling engagement to siblings who have aged out.
 - ✓ Implementation of Post-Permanency Sibling Contact Agreements
 - ✓ Services for children who exited foster care prior to the availability of Post-Permanency Sibling Contact Agreements, to invite willing parties to discuss exploring sibling contact.

Plans/Agreements	Timing	Details & Considerations
Sibling Placement & Contact Plan	DCFS must file the plan within 10 days of appointment (excluding weekends and holidays).	<p>If DCFS is appointed as the executive temporary custodian at a child’s temporary custody hearing, and the child has siblings in care, then DCFS shall file a sibling placement and contact plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - States if siblings will be placed together, what (if any) efforts were made to place together. - For siblings placed apart, it shall set forth the time and place of visits.
Sibling Contact Support Plan	<p>DCFS must convene meeting when siblings are placed apart.</p> <p>Must be incorporated in service plan & reviewed at each administrative case review.</p>	<p>A meeting must be held with all interested parties to create a plan for future contact between siblings in DCFS care who are placed apart.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporates current Sibling Visitation Plan requirements under Aristotle P.
Post-Permanency Sibling Contact Agreement	DCFS must convene meeting when preparing to finalize the adoption or guardianship of a child in DCFS care.	<p>A meeting must be held with all interested parties to discuss creating a non-enforceable agreement regarding post-permanency contact between the child and sibling(s).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DCFS must provide services to help develop agreements and to support parties in implementing, maintaining, & amending them.

My Family Matters Too

By April Curtis

Imagine yourself as a child—taken away from your parents and separated from your siblings and then placed in a new home. This is not only scary, it can be confusing to children that do not understand why they are being taken away from the only homes that they know, regardless as to whether the homes were abusive or neglectful. Imagine yourself having all kinds of questions as to why you are being punished and taken away from your family, but no one answers. In this kind of situation, whom would you turn to for comfort?

For myself, these questions were all too real. I came into the foster care system when I was 3 years old. Originally, I was placed in a relative's home, which allowed me to maintain contact with my extended family. However, when this placement ended, I was put into a traditional foster home and separated from all of my family except for one brother. I never understood why I was only able to visit

with my mom and siblings but not the rest of my family—many of whom had been integral to my life. It was as if my family had disappeared.

This article will explore the magnitude of sibling bonds and the importance of maintaining these bonds even after one of more of the siblings obtains permanency or is emancipated. The article will also explore the critical need to expand the “family” definition in the child welfare system to include extended kin as well as fictive kin who have been key stakeholders in the lives of the children.

Importance of Maintaining and Strengthening Sibling Relationships

The bonds between siblings can be stronger than the bond between parent and child and often outlast parent/child or husband/wife relationships (Hochman, et al, 1992). Yet in the child welfare system, sibling bonds are often downplayed and sometimes totally overlooked. By focusing on the

best interest of individual children and youth, the foster care system sometimes neglects the best interest of siblings and families. This phenomenon often occurs when there is a significant age difference between the siblings and/or young siblings who are separated. Maintaining sibling relationships decreases the loss children/youth go through and provides life-long supports to individuals who may have few other resources. As a result, siblings should be seen as key family members and efforts made in maintaining these relationships should be considered family preservation.

When parents are completely out of the picture, siblings may be the only accessible family members. Siblings can be there for the emotional trials and tribulations of life, alleviating the stress of isolation. It should be noted that most lifetime transitions, maybe with the exception of marriage, revealed stronger emotional bonds between siblings than that of parents (Kang, 2002). Going through life transitions together can give siblings a sense of stability. In foster care, children face many obstacles including placement instability. Sibling relationship may be the one consistent thing that children and youth in care have to hold onto. Additionally, siblings can help guide each other through the unique experiences associated with being in care.

Retaining sibling ties can also help children/youth maintain their culture, family traditions, shared history, connectedness, and identity. This is who they are, something that no one can take away from them. It provides them with an understanding of their roots, a history, and share memories

(see Family - next page)



How to connect with your brothers and sisters



*Information for youth,
parents and caregivers*

Illinois Department of
DCFS
Children & Family Services

English-

http://www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/CFS_105095_Sibling_Visitation_Rights_Booklet.pdf

Cómo conectarte con tus hermanos y hermanas



Información para los jóvenes,
padres y cuidadores

Illinois Department of
DCFS
Children & Family Services

Spanish-

http://www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/CFS_1050-95_S_Sibling_Visitation_Rights_Booklet.pdf

QUESTIONS



VIDEO RESOURCE

AdoptUSKids Video on Siblings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb3SwPfJMzs&list=PLB8A8C172FE1640EF&index=10>

SITE DISCUSSION



- What innovative programming/policy/law does your site have that promotes sibling connection prior to or after permanence.
- What has been or do you anticipate being the most difficult aspect of family engagement with the intervention your site has selected.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

- Financial resources provided by the QIC-AG for FY15/16 were sent out for review.
- Financial meetings will take place in December/Jan to discuss cost plans for this year.
- Next month learning opportunity

THE REMAINDER OF YEAR TWO AT A GLANCE

- Sustainability plans
- Installation and implementation
- Implementation supports
- Usability testing
- Capacity building
- Key dates for the year



QUESTIONS

Additional Information on the QIC-AG
can be found at:

www.qic-ag.org



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