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LEADER'S GUIDE:

Cut Off by Sylvia Perez

My daughter and I miss her foster parents.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Fear and loss after reunification.

ACTIVITY GOAL

Participants will identify how children may express grief, sadness and fear after reunification.

STORY SUMMARY

Sylvia and her daughter, Lydia, felt very close and connected with Lydia's foster parent during the three years that Lydia lived in Tamara's home. They planned to continue a close relationship after reunification. However, Lydia's behavior after she came home, and accusations that she made about being mistreated while in foster care, led Sylvia to fear that Tamara had harmed her daughter. When Sylvia and Lydia confided in a therapist, both his reaction and the agency's led Tamara to cut off contact.

Sylvia and Lydia felt deeply sad, hurt, abandoned and betrayed—by the agency and Tamara. Sylvia does her best to help her daughter handle the loss, while grieving herself.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we're going to talk about the fear and loss children feel after reunification. Although reunification is a happy event, it's also stressful for children, who often lose their relationships with the foster family, as well as familiar things like the foods, daily routines and discipline style they've gotten used to. Children also come home fearful that the reunion will not work out. Children may show loss and fear through anxious, clingy, angry, demanding or self-destructive behaviors (sometimes following a "honeymoon" period). Many times parents and foster parents blame each other for behavior that actually reflects a normal reaction to grief and fear.

- Does anyone have a question about this topic before we get started?

READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Remind participants about important moments in the story and ask them to reflect on the motivations and behaviors described in the story.

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
After she came home, Lydia wanted to be with Sylvia all the time and had nightmares about her foster home.	What fears did Lydia have after she came home? What losses did she experience?
Lydia wanted her brothers home with her and told negative stories about how Tamara treated her and her brothers.	What do you think Lydia was trying to achieve through her behaviors and comments?
Lydia and Sylvia felt betrayed and abandoned by the therapist, agency and Tamara.	Do you think the therapist, agency, or Tamara could have acted differently? Why or why not?
Lydia and Sylvia continue to deeply miss Tamara and the boys.	How do Sylvia and Lydia still feel the impact of Tamara's departure from their lives?
Sylvia plans to reach out to Tamara privately, either to reconnect or to ask for a chance to say goodbye.	What hopes do you have for Lydia, Sylvia and Tamara's relationship in the future?

REFLECTION: 30-45 minutes

Through writing, participants can more deeply reflect on their own experiences and what they've learned. Hand out the "Group Reflection" worksheet and give participants time to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs.

To promote self-reflection, hand out the "Personal Reflections" worksheet. Participants can share their responses in the group, in pairs, or after the workshop with a peer, family member, therapist or other important person in their lives.

GROUP REFLECTION: Cut Off by Sylvia Perez

Let's reflect on what we've learned from this story and consider how the topic relates to our own experiences and roles. Take a few minutes to jot down your responses on this sheet and then we'll share our responses with the group.

How did the story affect you? Choose a few sentences to complete.

This reminds me of... _____

I can't really understand... _____

I could relate to... _____

I was surprised... _____

I noticed... _____

I'm concerned that... _____

I hope that... _____

What have you learned? Write down your suggestions.

1. If I were a foster parent, I could help children cope with the losses of reunification by:

2. If I were a parent, I could help my children cope with the losses of reunification by:

3. If I were an agency worker, I could help families cope with the losses of reunification by:

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Cut Off by Sylvia Perez

How does this story relate to you—your relationship with your child’s family or foster family, or your role as a support to parents and foster parents? Use the questions below to consider how the story relates to your own experiences.

MY ROLE

How has your thinking changed since reading this story?

What do you feel excited about or concerned about after reading and reflecting on the story?

ACTION STEPS

How can you use what you learned from the story? Please write down a few steps you plan to take related to your role as a parent, foster parent, or child welfare staff,

1.

2.

3.
