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LEADER'S GUIDE:

Breaking a Painful Pattern by Milagros Sanchez
My children won't grow up silenced and afraid.

DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Establishing routines to build safety and trust after reunification.

ACTIVITY GOAL:

Participants will understand how to incorporate routines and bonding activities into visits and prepare for reunification.

STORY SUMMARY

As a child, Milagros was abused and not listened to by her mother. After discovering her mother had a similar childhood, Milagros realizes her family has been caught in a pattern of abuse and silence. In drug treatment, she resolves to break that cycle with her own children.

She establishes regular routines and bonding activities with her children, and is open and honest about her addiction and their time in foster care. Although she experiences some setbacks, her efforts have led to more open communication and a stronger bond with her sons.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we're going to talk about your child's transition home from foster care. While parents and children look forward to reunification, they also worry about being together again. Children may feel angry, confused and sad about their time in care, and worried that they will return to foster care. Parents may feel the same way. You can use visits to establish routines and bond with your children, plan activities for overnights that help your children feel thought about and calm, and use structures like family meetings to continue addressing your children's concerns and your own after they return home.

- How do you feel about this topic?
- Do you have experiences related to this topic that you'd like to share before we get started?

READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Help participants recognize the writer's emotions and coping mechanisms and their own. Go back over important moments in the story and ask the participants about how they've handled similar experiences:

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Milagros's mother treats problems with silence and physical violence.	When you were a child, how did your parents deal with conflict? What lessons did you learn from that?
Milagros plans activities with her kids to help them bond.	What kinds of activities help you bond with your children?
Milagros has a setback in a stressful moment with her son.	When you're trying to make a change in your life, how do you deal with setbacks? What helps you get back on track?
Milagros resolves to talk through everything with her sons.	What can be difficult about talking to your children when problems come up? What makes it easier to be open with each other?
Milagros establishes a weekly "family conference" and "family game night."	What kinds of routines or traditions do you have with your children (or would you like to start)? How might these be helpful for your children?

JOURNAL TIME: 15-30 minutes

By writing in their journals, participants can more deeply reflect on their experiences and the steps they can take to strengthen themselves and their families. Hand out the "Journal Reflections" worksheet and give participants 15-30 minutes to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs, or after the workshop with a counselor, therapist, or peer.

NAME:

DATE:

JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: Breaking a Painful Pattern by Milagros Sanchez

It's not easy for Milagros to break the cycle of abuse and silence in her family. But she takes many concrete steps to create a home that is the opposite of the one she grew up in: one where there is honesty, openness, safety, trust and love. Her steps include being open about her mistakes and answering her children's questions honestly; establishing fun routines and activities with them; finding ways to calm herself down when things get stressful; and committing to talking through problems with her children.

Write in your journal (or below) about the kinds of changes you would like to make in your own family, and the steps you can take.

1. What kind of a home would you like to create with your children when they return?

2. How is it different from the home you grew up in or the home you had with your children before foster care?

3. What do you think will be challenging about making those changes?

4. What are your strengths as a parent? How will your strengths help you deal with those challenges?

ACTION STEPS

Write down 2-3 new activities or routines you would like to start with your children, to help build the kind of relationships you'd like to have with them.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION

I plan to get support and encouragement by talking about my reflections and action steps with:
