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## LEADER'S GUIDE:

**'It Won't Happen Again'** by Youshell Williams  
Regaining my faith in myself and my children's trust in me.

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### DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Handling children's anger after reunification.

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### ACTIVITY GOAL:

Participants will explore ways to regain the trust of children who have experienced domestic violence and foster care placement.

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### STORY SUMMARY

*Youshell successfully leaves an abusive relationship and re-establishes a safe home for her children, but she soon becomes depressed. Eventually, her depression leads her to keep her children home from school, and she loses them to foster care. Youshell then loses confidence in herself as a parent and her children's trust that she can be counted on to take care of them.*

*After three years, Youshell's children come home angry and fearful. Family therapy helps Youshell reconnect with her children and reassure them.*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we're going to talk about the difficult emotions that you and your children may feel after reunification. When children are in foster care, they and their parents feel excited about what it will be like to be together again, but reunification is also complicated. Children may feel disappointed in their parents, anxious about their future, and angry that they ended up in care. Parents may feel shaky about their parenting, especially if they are not sure how to handle unexpected anger. Because these feelings can be overwhelming and confusing, it is important to plan for how you will deal with those feelings when they arise.

- 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
Youshell feels afraid that she will fail again if she attempts to bring her children home.	When have you felt anxious to prove yourself to your children?
Youshell and her children play a game in family therapy that helps her understand their feelings.	What helps you to understand your children's feelings? What help could you use?
Playing games helps Youshell hear the fear behind her children's anger.	What fears do you believe your children may have bottled up inside them?
Youshell's persistence in listening to her children's feelings helps her rebuild their trust in her.	What further steps might you take to reassure your children that they can open up to you and depend on you?
Youshell and her children feel more relaxed and comfortable together now.	How do you think your family life could be different if your communication with your children improved?

## 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:**

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You can strengthen ties with your children after reunification if you find ways to help them express their feelings about what they've gone through and take steps to show them that they can depend on you.. Write about the steps you can take to connect with your children and reassure them.

How do your children communicate their feelings to you now?

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How would you like them to express themselves? What could help you improve your communication with your childrne?

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What have you done to reassure them that they'll be safe and stable at home?

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OVER 

What is your greatest concern about taking care of your children once they come home?

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### **ACTION STEPS**

Reunification is a wonderful experience, but it also brings up complicated emotions. Write down 2-3 steps you can take to deal with the concerns you have about reunifying. What can you do now and what can you do after they come home?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

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### **A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION**

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

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