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LEADER'S GUIDE

Forever Family by Wanda Chambers

My daughter's foster mother is still part of our lives.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Planning for continued contact.

ACTIVITY GOAL

Participants will identify options for continued contact after reunification (or adoption).

STORY SUMMARY

Wanda was not part of her daughter's life while she was incarcerated. Once released, she faced an uphill battle in winning the trust of her daughter, her daughter's foster mother and the agency. Wanda chose to "kill them with kindness" and got termination proceedings reversed.

After reunification, Wanda was not planning to keep in touch with the foster mother, but changed her mind when she realized how much her daughter missed the family that had cared for her for three years—and how much the family missed her daughter. Now she and the foster mother are close.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we're going to talk about how parents and foster parents can make a plan for continued contact after reunification or adoption. While continued contact is rarely mandated, children benefit if they are allowed to maintain connections to the important people in their lives. Children returning home after long absences must grieve the loss of their foster parent and get used to all new routines, expectations and parenting styles. Adopted children must grieve the loss of their imagined return home. The transition can be much easier on both the parent and child if the parent and foster parent make a clear plan to share phone calls, letters, or visits.

- 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
Wanda plans to cut off contact with the foster mom.	Why do you think Wanda wanted to end contact with the foster family after her daughter came home?
Wanda's daughter says she wishes that her mom and foster mom could live in one big house together.	How do you think it would have affected Wanda's daughter if she didn't see the foster mom again?
The foster mom teaches Wanda to cook foods her daughter has become used to eating.	What else did Wanda's daughter have to get used to? How did the foster mom's involvement help her adjust?
Wanda and the foster parent do not always agree with each other's parenting styles.	What do you think is positive and negative about Wanda's daughter of spending time with families who have different parenting styles?
Wanda and Ms. Ortiz come to see each other as extended family.	What impact do you think this lasting connection has on Wanda, her daughter and Ms. Ortiz?

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: Forever Family by Wanda Chambers

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 stay connected after reunification by:

2. If I were a parent, I could stay connected to my child's foster family after reunification by:

3. If I were an agency worker, I could help families make a plan for staying connected after reunification by:

OVER 

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Forever Family by Wanda Chambers

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. _____
