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LEADER'S GUIDE

'She's Still Your Mother' by Queenie Butler
I am angry at my sister but my nieces need her love.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Supporting children's connection to their parents.

ACTIVITY GOAL

Participants will explore how to support children's connections to parents despite conflicts.

STORY SUMMARY

Queenie does not get along with her sister, whose two daughters she ended up adopting. Queenie feels that her sister blames her for the girls' placement, refuses to follow the agency's rules, and confuses and upsets the girls by telling them they will be coming home.

Even so, Queenie tries to help her nieces maintain a positive relationship with their mother. She encourages the girls to forgive their mother for her mistakes and lets the girls talk with and visit their mother regularly. Queenie also tries to understand her sister's perspective and hopes they will grow close once again.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Parents and foster parents may feel strong hostility, distrust and frustration toward each other. Parents may blame the foster parent for the child's removal or feel angry at the foster parents because they feel ashamed and powerless. Foster parents may feel attacked or angry that parents are not taking steps to reunify with their children. Conflicts can make children feel anxious; many times they feel pressure to split their loyalty. However, it's possible to encourage children's relationships with their parents even when parents and foster parents are not getting along. "Fake it 'til you make it" may be a good strategy for slowly building trust and compassion.

- 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
Queenie's sister makes negative comments and accusations.	What do you think motivates her sister?
Queenie is overwhelmed and wants to give up but the agency encourages her to keep taking care of her nieces.	What role could the agency play in mediating their conflicts?
Queenie's sister refuses to believe the adoption and tells the girls (falsely) that they'll be coming home.	How do you think the conflicts between Queenie and her sister affect the girls?
The girls feel angry at their mother but Queenie urges them to forgive her and keep talking and visiting.	How does Queenie try to protect the girls and encourage a relationship with their mother?
Writing about her experience helped Queenie feel more compassionately toward her sister.	What do you think could help Queenie and her sister rebuild their relationship?

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: 'She's Still Your Mother' by Queenie Butler

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 reduce hostility or distrust between myself and the parent by:

2. If I were a parent, I could reduce hostility or distrust between myself and the foster parent by:

3. If I were an agency worker, I could help parents and foster parents overcome hostility or distrust by:

OVER →

PERSONAL REFLECTION: 'She's Still Your Mother' by Queenie Butler

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. _____
