

Understanding the Story

Family Mosaics

Discussion Guide



Capacity Building
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Get the Whole Picture

In a mosaic, where individual pieces come together to form a vivid picture, looking at only one piece by itself doesn't show you all there is to see. In the same way, different perspectives within a family come together to tell a more complete story of what is needed to support family well-being.

Each set of videos in this series is a mosaic that illustrates the efforts required to build trusting, collaborative relationships between resource parents, kinship caregivers, families, child welfare agency staff, and service providers.

Use the activities in this guide with the mosaics to spark conversations and critical thinking among agency staff, resource parents, kinship caregivers, service providers, and community groups. More information, including the family mosaic videos, can be found at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency-family-mosaics/videos>.

Build a Common Understanding

Partner these activities with the family mosaics to build a common understanding of what it means to see foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents. Individuals can use activities to reflect on how to sharpen relationship-building skills, and teams can use activities to identify the barriers to working in partnership and find collective solutions. Activities can be used independently, combined for a longer workshop, or used in a series. Read the descriptions of the five family mosaics in appendix B to decide which stories to use in each activity.

Activity 1: What's the Story?

Assign as prework for a collaborative meeting, training, or one-on-one coaching with these instructions.

1. Individually, watch the first story in a family mosaic.
2. Pause and make note of what you think about the family's situation. What are the family's strengths, and what are their needs for well-being?
3. Continue watching the second and third stories in the mosaic.
4. Reassess the family's situation, strengths, and needs for well-being.
 - a. What assumptions did you make without having the additional perspectives?
 - b. How did this add to your understanding of the family's story?
 - c. What did you observe about building trusting relationships?
 - d. How did the mosaic demonstrate foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?

How Can I Use Family Mosaic Activities?

Leaders and program managers:

Build an agency culture that supports collaborative work with families and communities. Use activities in meetings with management and community partners to align values and beliefs around foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents.

Supervisors:

Use in one-on-one coaching and team meetings to create shared understanding and develop collaborative strategies. Assign individual and collective activities that will help staff value the time and effort needed to build trusting relationships between resource parents, kinship caregivers, families, child welfare agency staff, and service providers.

Training managers:

Integrate into training for preservice staff, supervisors, kinship caregivers, and resource parents to enhance skills for creating trusting relationships and build understanding of foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents.

Activity 2: Adding Pieces to the Picture

Use with small or large groups in meetings or trainings. Choose one or more mosaics to view for this exercise.

Purpose

- ◆ To deepen empathy around the various perspectives of parents, kin, children and youth, resource parents, service providers, and caseworkers about what support and services are needed for family well-being
- ◆ To examine how including or excluding different perspectives may influence decisions about what support and services the family needs

Prepare the Audience

Tell participants that they will be viewing the mosaic while thinking about it from the perspective of one of six assigned roles.

Explain that only three viewpoints are given in each mosaic. Some participants will be creating the additional roles based on their own imagination and experiences with people in those roles.

Assign one of six roles to each audience member, using a standard method such as counting off by six or passing out prepared cards.

- ◆ Parent
- ◆ Agency worker
- ◆ Kinship caregiver
- ◆ Resource parent
- ◆ Service provider
- ◆ Child or youth

Instruct participants to take notes as they view the mosaic, reflecting on the feelings, struggles, contributions, efforts, needs, and supports from the viewpoint of their assigned role.

View the full mosaic.

Discuss

After viewing the full mosaic, ask participants to answer the questions from the perspective of their role.

Begin with the three groups with roles that are represented in the mosaic.

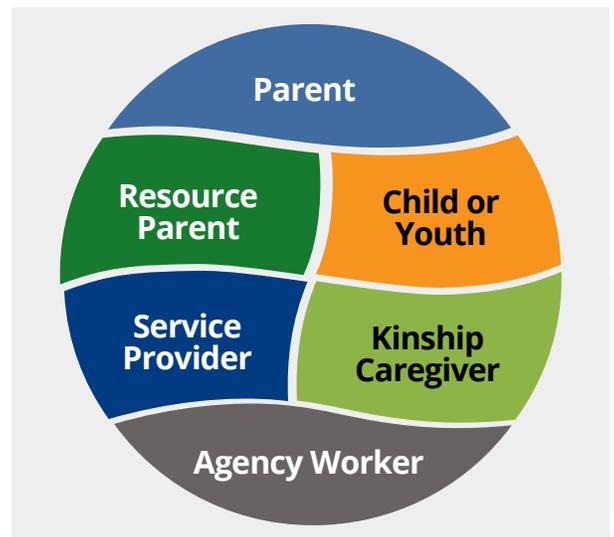
- ◆ How does this individual feel at the beginning of this situation? How do these feelings evolve?
- ◆ What does this individual want or need? Who can provide it?
- ◆ What are the perceived barriers?
- ◆ What does this family need to be able to parent in a safe way?
- ◆ What does the child need to live in safe, permanent, and stable environment that supports their well-being?
- ◆ What does this individual contribute to support family well-being?

After each group's perspective is added, facilitate a group discussion to compare viewpoints, evaluate what children, parents, and kin may need, and who would best be able to provide services and support. Consider how the collective perspectives can help develop more informed strategies.*

- ◆ How does adding this perspective influence your decisions about what this family needs?
- ◆ How would missing this perspective influence your work?
- ◆ How does having this perspective add to the well-being of the child(ren) and family?

Continue with the three groups with roles that are not represented in the mosaic.

- ◆ If you were able to hear from the person in this role, how might adding this perspective change the picture for you?
- ◆ How might adding this perspective influence your decisions about what this family needs?



- ◆ How might adding this perspective contribute to the well-being of the child(ren) and family?

After all perspectives are added, ask the group to consider:

- ◆ What perspectives are critical for your work?
- ◆ What strategies can you use to collect different perspectives to give you a more complete picture?
- ◆ What are the benefits of viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?

This activity may be repeated with additional mosaics.

**To use this activity with resource parents, consider substituting these questions:*

- ◆ *How does adding this perspective influence your thoughts about what this family needs?*
- ◆ *How would missing this perspective influence how you relate to the parents?*
- ◆ *How does having this perspective add to the well-being of the child(ren) and family?*

Continue with the three groups with roles that are not represented in the mosaic.

- ◆ *If you were able to hear from the person in this role, how might adding this perspective change the picture for you?*
- ◆ *How might adding this perspective influence your thoughts about what the parent(s), child(ren), and kin need?*
- ◆ *How might adding this perspective contribute to the well-being of the child(ren) and family?*

After all perspectives are added, ask the group to consider:

- ◆ *How does the support to the family from different roles add to the well-being of the child(ren)?*
- ◆ *What strategies did you observe that you can use to be a support to parents?*
- ◆ *What are the benefits of viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?*

Activity 3: Cementing the Pieces in Place

Use with small or large groups in meetings or trainings. Choose one or more mosaics to view for this exercise.

Purpose

- ◆ To deepen empathy around the various perspectives of parents, kin, children and youth, resource parents, service providers, and caseworkers about what is needed to build a trusting relationship
- ◆ To identify strategies for removing barriers to collaborative, trusting relationships

Prepare the Audience

Trusting relationships are the glue that holds the pieces together.

Show two or more mosaics to the group, asking them to look for examples of behaviors that helped to build trust.

Ask the group what they observed in the mosaics that contributed to building trust between people.

Tell participants that they will be answering the questions in this activity from the perspective of one of six assigned roles.

Explain that only three viewpoints are shown in each mosaic. Some participants will be creating the additional roles based on their own imagination and experiences with people in those roles.

Assign one of six roles to each audience member by distributing prepared cards.

- ◆ Parent
- ◆ Agency worker
- ◆ Kinship caregiver
- ◆ Resource parent
- ◆ Service provider
- ◆ Child or youth

Mix and Mingle

Ask participants to find and talk with each of the other five assigned roles, spending just 2 minutes answering these questions:

- ◆ What are the barriers to building a trusting, collaborative relationship between these two roles?
- ◆ What are strategies to bust the barriers?

Discuss

Facilitate a group discussion.

- ◆ What are the common barriers to building trusting, collaborative relationships?
- ◆ What are strategies to bust the barriers?

Activity 4: Looking at the Whole Picture

Use with small or large groups in meetings or trainings as a follow-up to other activities.

Now that the group has examined the individual parts of the picture and considered how to build trusting, collaborative relationships, it's time to put what they've learned into action. Facilitate a discussion to move new ideas into practice.

In your role within the agency:*

- ◆ What can you do to improve practice immediately?
- ◆ How can you improve the supports you provide to families and kinship caregivers?
- ◆ What can you do to promote trusting relationships between families, kinship caregivers, resource parents, agency staff, and service providers?
- ◆ What strategies can you use to include the different perspectives of families, kinship caregivers, resource parents, and service providers?
- ◆ What are the barriers to viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?
- ◆ What strategies can you use to change the culture toward viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?
- ◆ What resources or supports do you need to make improvements?
- ◆ Who can you ask for needed support or resources?
- ◆ What can you do to sustain change?

**To use this activity with resource parents, consider substituting these questions:*

In your role as a resource parent:

- ◆ *What can you do to improve trust and collaboration immediately?*
- ◆ *How can you improve the supports you provide to parents and kinship caregivers?*
- ◆ *What can you do to promote trusting relationships between parents, kinship caregivers, resource parents, agency staff, and service providers?*
- ◆ *What strategies can you use to include the different perspectives of families, kinship caregivers, agency staff, and service providers?*
- ◆ *What are the barriers to viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?*
- ◆ *What strategies can you use to change the culture toward viewing foster care as a support to families, not a substitute for parents?*
- ◆ *What resources or supports do you need to make improvements?*
- ◆ *Who can you ask for needed support or resources?*
- ◆ *What can you do to sustain change?*

Activity 5: Keep the Conversation Going

After completing the activities above, teams and individuals are ready to make changes to practice. Use this next activity to keep the conversation going and check in on changes over time. This activity can be used in team meetings, group supervision, or one-on-one coaching.

Instructions

Assign the research and discussion handout (appendix A), and ask participants to read the research, consider the questions, and review the mosaic videos, if needed. Debrief each question below. Keep a record of desired practice changes or needed supports for future follow-up.

- ◆ What are the most important points in the research?
- ◆ How are these reflected in the mosaics?
- ◆ In what ways are the relationships between people in the mosaics similar to what you see in everyday practice?
- ◆ In what ways are they different?
- ◆ What did you see that you could use to make a positive change in practice?
- ◆ What can you do to improve practice immediately?
- ◆ How can you improve the supports you provide to families and kinship caregivers?
- ◆ What can you do to promote trusting relationships between families, kinship caregivers, resource parents, agency staff, and service providers?
- ◆ What can you do to include different perspectives?
- ◆ What resources or supports do you need to make improvements?

References

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Appendix A

Understanding the Story: Research and Discussion Questions

What Do We Know? The Research on Family Perspectives

Collaborative relationships between resource parents, kinship caregivers, child welfare agency staff, service providers, and families matter to the well-being of children in care. The respectful and supportive behavior between agency staff and parents models the family-centered practice that resource parents can practice with a child's parents, and families who are supported by teams are more likely to be successful in reunification (Geiger, Piel, & Julien-Chinn, 2017). Positive relationships and open communication between workers and parents matter and correlate with better outcomes in discipline and emotional care of children (Lee, 2004). To be of support to parents, kinship caregivers and foster care families have to be open minded, recognize the contributions of a child's parents, avoid judgement, and accept their limitations. The child's parents must work to accept that children may have meaningful relationships with the foster parents (Chateauneuf, Turcotte, & Drapeau, 2018).

Kinship care has increased considerably as a method to sustain permanency planning since the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. Some research finds that children placed in kinship care fare better than children placed in foster care, experiencing fewer behavioral problems and mental health disorders, better well-being, less placement disruption, fewer needs for mental health services, and similar reunification rates (Winokur, Holtan, & Batchelder, 2018). Children placed with kin have better well-being outcomes and are more likely to remain in the same neighborhood, be placed with siblings, and have consistent contact with their parents as compared to children in foster care (Geen, 2004; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Mack, 2009). These contributing factors are believed to lead to more positive outcomes because there are fewer disruptions in the children's lives.

Some research indicates that relatives receive less support, training, and supervision than nonrelative caregivers (O'Brien, 2012). Kinship caregivers, as compared to the traditional foster care parent population, face greater socioeconomic and physical challenges, more limited access to needed services, and an agency staff that may struggle with policy and practice to support them (Wichinsky, Thomas, DeJohn, & Turney, 2013). Policies, procedures, interventions, and support services created with nonrelative foster caregivers in mind may create barriers for kinship caregivers. Collaborative, supportive relationships among all parties can facilitate early assessment of family, kin, and child needs and identification of services and support to promote family well-being.

After reading the research, consider these questions:

- ◆ What are the most important points in the research?
- ◆ How are these reflected in the mosaics?
- ◆ In what ways are the relationships between people in the mosaics similar to what you see in everyday practice?
- ◆ In what ways are they different?
- ◆ What did you see that you could use to make a positive change in practice?
- ◆ What can you do to improve practice immediately?
- ◆ How can you improve the supports you provide to families and kinship caregivers?
- ◆ What can you do to promote trusting relationships between families, kinship caregivers, resource parents, agency staff, and service providers?
- ◆ What can you do to include different perspectives?
- ◆ What resources or supports do you need to make improvements?

Appendix B

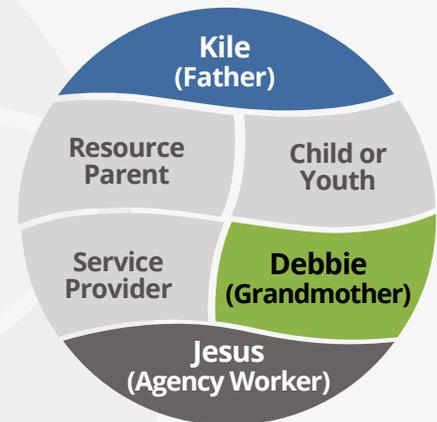
Family Mosaic Descriptions

Review the descriptions of the five mosaics. Each mosaic uses different perspectives to tell the family's story. Pick and choose from these to determine which stories would work best for your team or individual activities.

Mosaic 1: When Family Supports Family

Kile, Debbie, Jesus

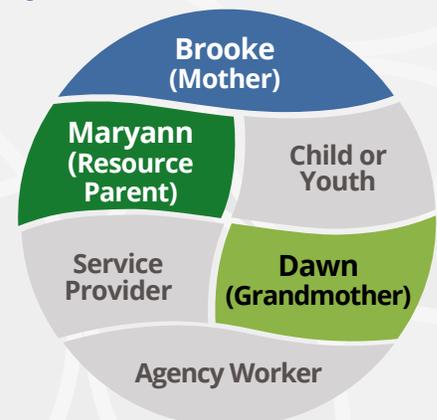
Tells the story of a family from the perspectives of a father; his mother, who takes on the parenting role for her five grandchildren; and their social worker. With the help of supportive relationships, wraparound services, and peer support, the family is able to be reunited.



Mosaic 2: Building Bridges From One Family to Another

Brooke, Dawn, Maryann

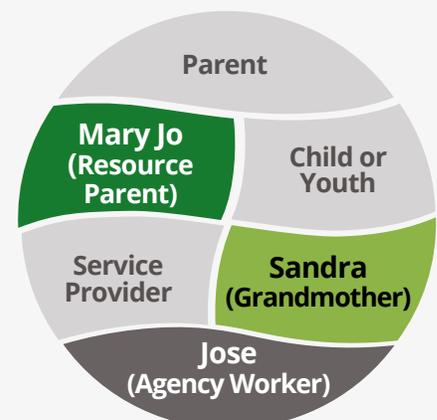
Portrays one family's story from the viewpoints of the mother, the grandmother, and the resource parent. The help and support of the resource parent, Maryann, made the grandmother's transition to caring for her granddaughter easier. Maryann's support and reassurance helped Brooke become a more competent mother, and Maryann continues to be a part of their family.



Mosaic 3: Forging a Path to Permanency

Sandra, Mary Jo, Jose

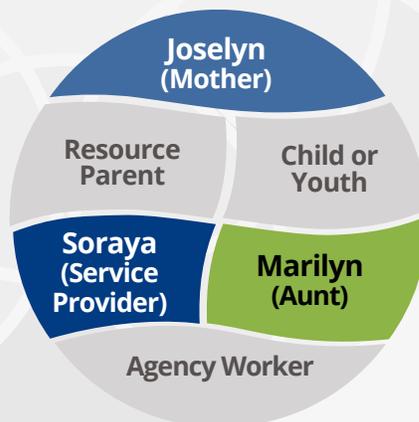
Demonstrates the importance of collaboration and trusting relationships between a grandmother, a resource parent, and a social worker. Because of the mother's mental illness, she is unable to safely parent her newborn. The social worker and an experienced resource parent helped to forge the path for the grandmother to establish attachment to her granddaughter. The child now lives with her grandmother, and the resource parent continues to have a personal relationship with the family.



Mosaic 4: It Takes a Village

Marilyn, Joselyn, Soraya

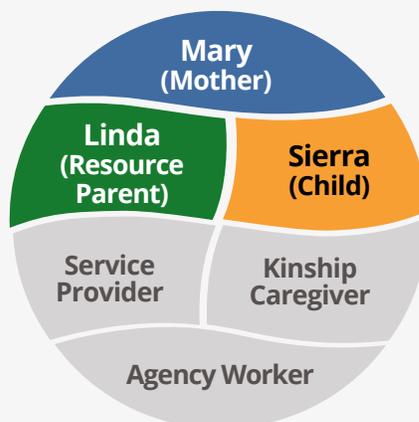
Describes the complex nature and special support needs of kinship care. The sister who steps up to become the kinship caregiver for her nephew, the boy's mother, and the service provider tell the family's story. With two children of her own, the aunt depends on her mother's support to make the situation work. The service provider builds a trusting relationship with the child's mother, enabling her to accept her family's support and the right services so she could be reunified with her son and her mother.



Mosaic 5: The Journey From Foster Care to Reunification

Sierra, Mary, Linda

Portrays a young woman's story of growing up in foster care, from 5 months through 7 years old, and the difficulties of transitioning back to her family. Staying in close contact with her foster family eased the transition, and Sierra now feels she has the support of two mothers. Told from the perspectives of the young woman, her mother, and her foster mother, the story demonstrates the challenges and importance of forging and maintaining trusting relationships.



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