

Ice Breakers

Background Notes

Icebreakers are the first meeting between birth parents and foster parents. The meetings provide an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents to talk about the needs of the child and share information about themselves and their parenting practices. Icebreakers are most effective when they occur early in a child's placement. When there is contact between birth and foster parents, studies show children have more stable placements, experience better emotional development, are more successful in school, and return home sooner. Contact with foster parents helps birth parents feel more at ease about their child's safety, well-being and placement which are critical factors in their own rehabilitation.

Tasks / Assignments:

- Find out if your office uses Icebreakers. If so, who facilitates the meetings? If there is not a formal process in your office, do caseworkers informally facilitate a meeting between foster parents and birth parents?
- Talk with your supervisor or co-worker about observing an Icebreaker.

Discoveries:

- *What was the interaction like between the foster parent(s) and the birth parent(s)?*
- *What was the caseworker's role in the meeting?*
- *What do you see as the benefits of the meeting?*
- *Were there any disadvantages to having the meeting?*
- *Do you think the foster parents and birth parents found the meeting helpful? Why or why not?*