

### PRESERVING CONNECTIONS AND REDUCING LOSS AND GRIEF

#### Preserving Connections

“The concept of preserving connections can be illustrated with an image of a potted plant. If you take a plant out of its pot, it is automatically in crisis, searching for stability and safety. In the same vein, when a child is removed from home, he or she can feel confused, uprooted, and shaken. Children in these situations often feel a sense of disconnect from their parents; a loss of extended family members (siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents); friends from the neighborhood, classmates and teachers; and separation from their religious affiliations and cultural ties. It is as if the child’s roots have been cut off. If we expect children to thrive in new environments, we must do our best to transplant with care, maintain connections, and when possible provide opportunities to reestablish roots in positive and meaningful ways.”

Shaening and Associates, Inc. & The New Mexico Supreme Court’s Court Improvement Project Task Force, *Preserving Connections*, rev. August, 2007, p. 3, <<http://shaening.com/projectDocs/Preserving%20Connections.pdf>> [as of November 2, 2011].

#### The Nature of Loss For Children

“The loss of a loved one is an earthquake that fractures and devastates our emotional landscape. Death is the most permanent loss we face; yet there are other forms of loss that can alter, break, or erode our emotional anchors. The most common types of loss for children are moving and divorce. In the modern world, adults control the context and the shape of our children’s relationships. When we decide to move or separate, often we have already taken the time to gradually adjust to these transitions. Yet we then turn around and force our choices onto our children. They have less time and fewer skills with which to adjust.

The pain of loss can be related to the nature of the transition. The sudden death, the abrupt move, and the unanticipated separation may all shatter existing emotional connections, often causing fear and intense emotional pain. When loss is sudden and unexpected, there is much less time for the child to begin adjusting. An anticipated death, separation, or move is easier because there has been time to think, review, anticipate, mourn and, slowly, reshape relationships. Gradual, predictable transitions, although they are painful, make the loss easier to deal with and accept. When informed, the child can prepare for the change ahead.

The pain from loss is also related to the nature of the relationship, the history of other losses, the vulnerability of the particular child, the support system available, and other factors. If a child is close and dependent upon the lost loved one, he or she is likely to experience more severe distress. If the move or the separation takes the child away from the loved one, he or she may experience a similar intensity of pain as if this were a death.

For most children, loss and fear go hand in hand. They do not know what will happen to them. And fear intensifies and complicates the other emotions associated with loss. The fearful child cannot concentrate in school; will misinterpret comments; and will sometimes regress to immature behavior (a young child may start to bed-wet) or self-destructive coping behavior (a preadolescent may drink or experiment with drugs).”

Perry, *Children and Loss*, <<http://www.childtrauma.org/index.php/articles/trauma-a-ptsd/42-children-and-loss>> [as of November 2, 2011].