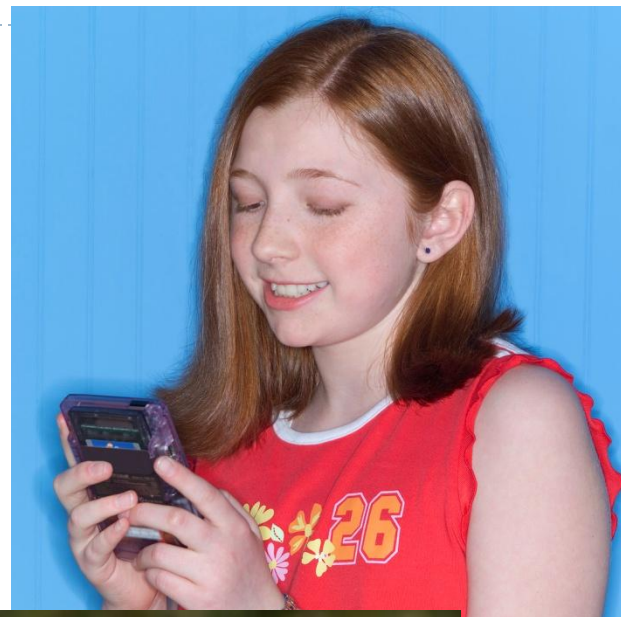




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Enacted Permanence in foster care

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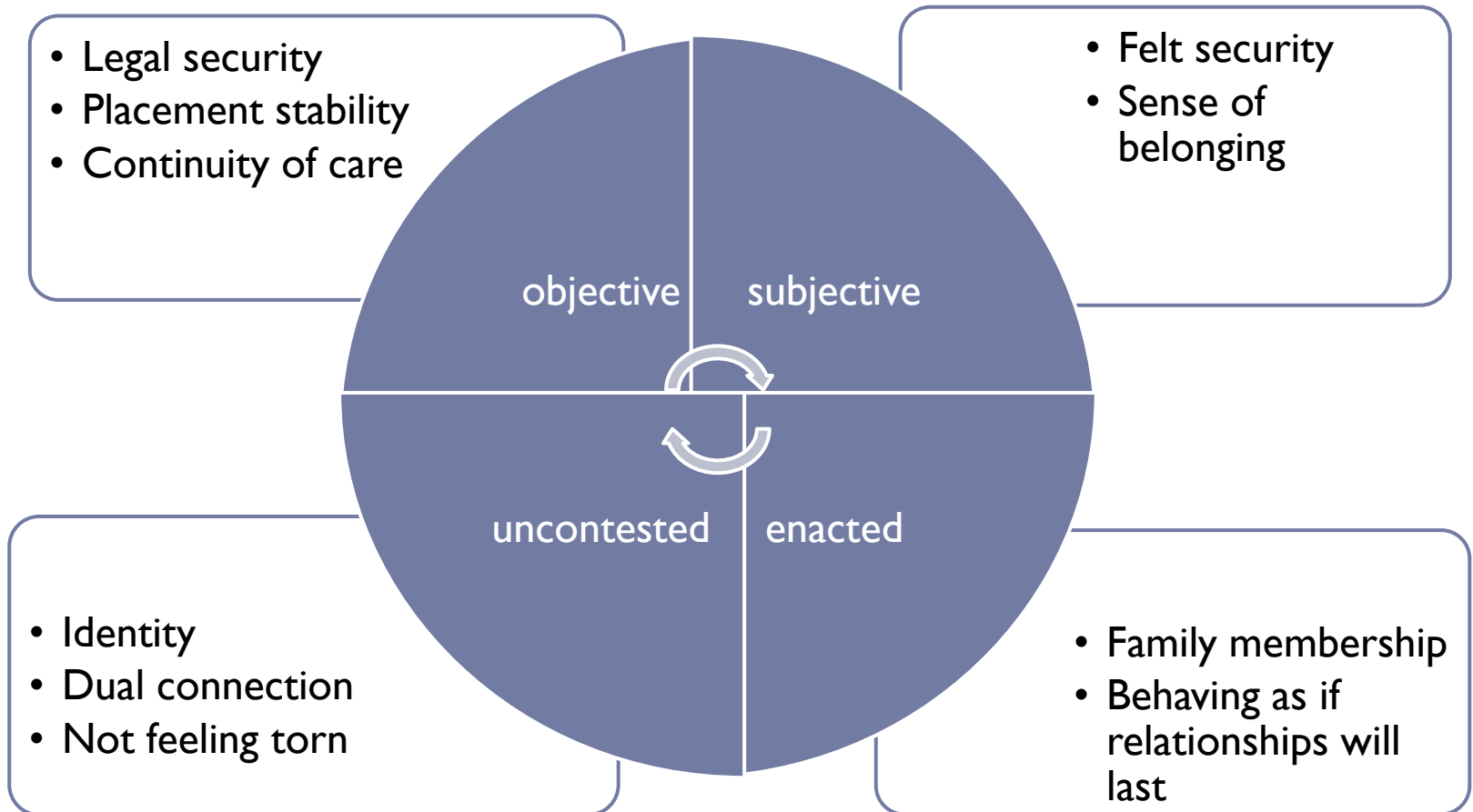


Policy definition of 'permanence'

- ▶ A sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity throughout childhood and beyond.
- ▶ Provision of a secure, stable and loving family through transitions out of care and into adulthood
- ▶ Bringing up children not just for childhood but for life



Dimensions of permanence



(adapted from Bullock et al, 2006)

Subjective and enacted permanence

- ▶ Patterns of perceived belonging Biehal (UK)
 - ▶ ‘as if’ –
 - ▶ primary identification with foster carers; viewed them ‘as if’ they were their parents
 - ▶ ‘just like’ –
 - ▶ belonging to birth and foster families; foster carers viewed as ‘just like’ another set of parents
 - ▶ qualified –
 - ▶ ambivalent feelings toward birth family; loyalty conflicts; ambivalent about belonging in foster family
 - ▶ Provisional –
 - ▶ Uncertain; placement close to disruption



Subjective and enacted permanence

- ▶ **Patterns of family membership Ellingsen et al (Norway)**
- ▶ **Confident and well adjusted**
 - ▶ Viewed both birth and foster families as 'family' loved by both
 - ▶ Sure of foster family as secure base in the future
- ▶ **Bonds strong with birth family / weak with foster family**
 - ▶ Birth relatives viewed as only family
 - ▶ Ambivalent about approaching foster carers for support
- ▶ **Bonds weak with birth family / strong with foster family**
 - ▶ Sure of permanent support from foster family
 - ▶ Birth family contact stressful



Felt belonging

- ▶ Young people can include foster and birth relatives as family
- ▶ Inclusive understandings of enduring kinship not solely defined by blood or legal ties
- ▶ Care, love, support, availability are primary criteria for kinship
- ▶ Foster family can be a secure base into adulthood
- ▶ Echoed in foster carer definitions of permanence = lifelong commitment and family obligation (Schofield et al 2012)



Family practices

- ▶ **Family practices** (Morgan, 2011; Smart, 2007)
- ▶ How family relationships are made and maintained through everyday activities
- ▶ 'family' as a verb and a noun
- ▶ 'doing' family rather than 'having' family



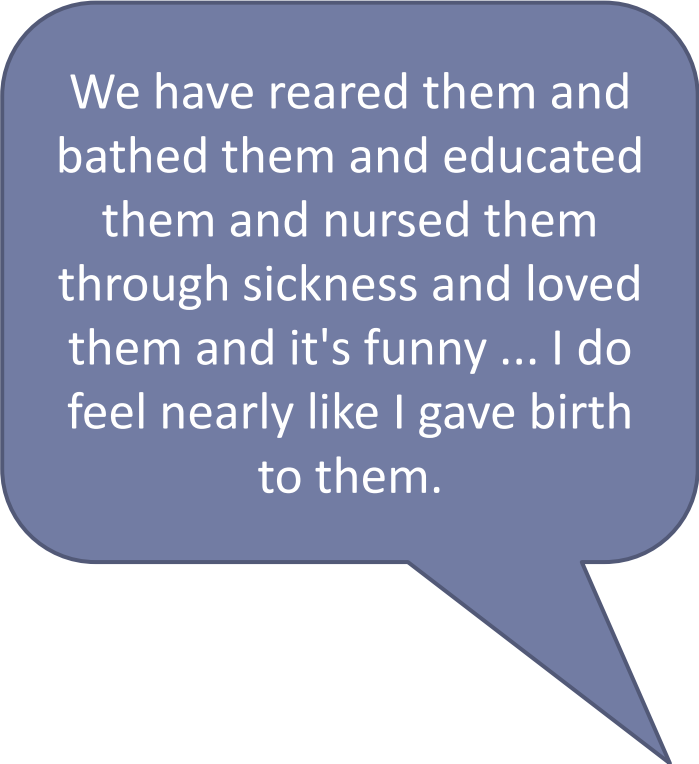
Family display

- ▶ Family members showing one another and the world that they are engaging in *family* relationships and not some other form of relationship
- ▶ Showing who belongs to our family
- ▶ ‘These are my family relationships and they work’
 - ▶ (Finch, 2000)



Family life

- ▶ 'normal' family routines
- ▶ kinship labels – 'mum' 'dad'
- ▶ being treated no differently
- ▶ connecting past, present and future
- ▶ who's photo is on the wall?



We have reared them and bathed them and educated them and nursed them through sickness and loved them and it's funny ... I do feel nearly like I gave birth to them.



Displays of care and commitment

“I first bonded with him when he broke his arm, funny enough. Suddenly I saw his vulnerability and he also saw something in me at that time too because I sat up with him all night. I remember him going ‘you stayed with me all night’. I know that was important to him and for me.”




Family rituals

- ▶ 'just us' times
- ▶ Family holidays, outings
- ▶ Inclusion in special celebrations
- ▶ public displays



Birth family contact

- ▶ Scaffolding relationships over time
- ▶ Explore wider kin networks
 - ▶ Natural mentoring
 - ▶ Family finding
- ▶ Who to include in contact –
 - ▶ Protective
 - ▶ Accepting
 - ▶ Minimise loyalty conflicts



They obviously
didn't want anyone
else to be the
mum



Professional practices

- ▶ Formal recognition
- ▶ Experience of formal reviews
- ▶ Delegated parental authority
- ▶ What messages do professionals give about permanence?
- ▶ Professional language – foster carer or foster parent?
- ▶ Role of leaving care social workers
- ▶ Critique the goal of independent living
- ▶ Scaffold existing and new kin networks
- ▶ Permission to develop family bonds



Summary

- ▶ Thinking early and planning ahead for relationships that will provide an enduring secure base
- ▶ Importance of family practices and enacted permanence
- ▶ Supporting child's sense of belonging
- ▶ Supporting young person's dual connection to foster and birth family
- ▶ Consider the long long-term – supportive relationships into adulthood



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