



# Discussion Guide for

## THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD: REDUCING THE TRAUMA OF CHILD REMOVAL

### TEN WAYS TO REDUCE REMOVAL TRAUMA

- 1. Endeavor to keep the child at home.
- 2. Speak directly to the child.
- 3. Make eye contact.
- 4. Speak calmly and slowly.
- 5. If the child is going to the shelter, tell her what to expect; show a photograph.
- 6. Never lie to the child; be honest.
- 7. Ask the child if he'd like to bring anything with him, such as a favorite toy.
- 8. Be sure the child is dressed appropriately.
- 9. Be prepared for the child to get upset. Be patient; never show anger to the child.
- 10. Your body language and the tone of your voice should be focused on reassuring the child and trying to lessen his fear.

### SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM

Is removal necessary? Is the child in immediate danger? How can I help this child stay at home? Is there a relative the child can stay with? Are there services we can provide the family?

These are all questions that social workers and police officers need to ask themselves when becoming involved in a child removal situation. This program provides guidelines on how to approach a case where a decision must be made

whether to remove a child from his home, and in the event that the child is to be removed, how best to approach the child and family.

Removing a child from home is very serious. Unexpected separation from a parent can feel like a life-or-death matter to a child. While the effects of removal trauma differ from child to child, studies show that most children will, in some way, be permanently scarred by their experience. Therefore, it's extremely important to weigh the potential harm of leaving the child at home against the traumatic effects of removal.

Every alternative should be explored so keep the child in the home. Home visitations, parenting classes, support groups, and substance abuse intervention are options that can strengthen the family.

In cases of domestic violence, everything possible should be done to remove the offender from the home rather than the child. A child should only be removed from the home when he or she is in immediate danger.

If it is decided that removal will be least detrimental to the child, your next job must be to find ways to minimize the trauma when a removal takes place.

Generally, the least traumatic time of day to remove a child is late afternoon. Removing the child during the school day is humiliating to the child

and will make it difficult for him to return to the school in the future. Removing a child at bedtime or in the middle of the night is especially traumatic and should be avoided if at all possible.

In almost every circumstance, it is best to have a social worker from a child protective services agency accompany a police officer. Also, whenever possible, have someone assist with the removal who speaks the language of the family and understands its customs.

Once in the home, the most important thing you can do is take the time you need to answer everyone's questions. Most families have little understanding of child welfare laws and have no idea what to expect. Give the parents something in writing that tells them what they have to do to visit their child.

Most parents will be in a state of shock when you arrive. If a child sees her parents extremely distraught, it may increase her own fear. She may feel that the person who is there to take her away is not safe. If possible, enlist the help of the parent, even if the parent objects to the child's removal. Let the parents know that they can help reduce the trauma the children experience if they remain calm.

Children tend to blame themselves for the bad things that happen to them. Young children removed from home may feel that the removal was their fault, that they did

something bad and are being punished by being taken away from their parents. The child should be reassured that he is not to blame.

As you try to reassure the child, always answer truthfully. It's okay to say you don't know. Be careful not to make any statements like, "You'll be able to see your dad soon," or, "Don't worry, it will be all right." No matter how well intentioned these words sound, a child will remember them and will be disappointed when things don't turn out the way you promised.

Be patient and never show anger to the child, no matter what she says or does. Your anger will only reinforce the child's belief that she is being punished.

During the removal, ask the parents if there is a relative or someone familiar to the child with whom the child can stay until a more permanent placement can be made. Siblings can greatly comfort each other during this stressful time. Whenever possible, place brothers and sisters at the same location.

If the child must go to a shelter, take the time to explain to him what to expect. If possible, show him pictures of the shelter.

Finally, ask the child if there is anything she wants to bring with her, like a favorite toy or photograph. Also, make sure the child takes proper clothing.



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Even if you do everything possible to lessen the trauma of the experience, be aware that in all probability the child will still experience some degree of trauma. However, if you remain sensitive to the needs of the children and their family, hopefully the negative images the children retain will not be associated with how you handled the situation.

### EVALUATION

Use this True/False quiz to test your knowledge about child removal and removal trauma.

1. The best way to determine if a child should be removed is by performing a standardized child safety assessment. (T)
2. In cases of domestic abuse, children should be removed if the abusive parent has a history of child abuse. (F)
3. No matter what a social worker or police officer does, children will experience some trauma when removed from their home. (T)
4. If removal is necessary, the best time to remove a child is during the school day because the parents are not present. (F)
5. If children get hysterical during the removal, it's best to get it over with as fast as possible. (F)
6. It's the social workers' or police officers' responsibility to talk to their supervisors and make sure they have the time they need to perform a removal correctly. (T)
7. Children will come with you more readily if you tell them that they'll be going home soon. (F)
8. Children often believe that they are being removed from home because they did something bad. (T)
9. Removal of a child should only happen when the child is in immediate danger. (T)
10. While responding to a routine call, police officers may need to perform a child safety assessment. In these cases, it's best to do the child safety assessment after a social worker arrives. (T)

### PROGRAMS DETAILS

#### LENGTH:

22 minutes

#### SUBJECT AREAS:

Health & Guidance

#### AUDIENCE LEVELS:

Adult

#### ORDER NUMBER:

1-9291SG

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