

A stone arch bridge spans a river in a lush, green valley. The bridge is constructed from large, grey stone blocks. The surrounding landscape is filled with dense green trees and shrubs. In the background, there are tall, rocky cliffs with some vegetation. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

*Loss*

*Hope*

*A Self-Directed*

*Workbook for Foster Parents*

**Building Bridges of Hope After Loss:**  
A Self-Directed Workbook for Foster Parents

Developed by  
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# Acknowledgements and Welcome

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This workbook is dedicated to the many foster families who open their hearts to take care of the children who join them. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to provide safety and well-being to these vulnerable children and help them connect to relationships that are lasting.

Thank you for taking the time to open this workbook. I hope that this workbook will be helpful for you and everyone who has feelings of sadness, grief, and loss when children you have cared for and love leave your family. I hope that you have some satisfaction in knowing that you made a difference.

# Table of Contents

Introduction to the Workbook .....	1
Getting Started .....	2
Section 1: Wellness Toolbox .....	3
Section 2: Foster Care & Permanency.....	7
Section 3: Understanding Grief & Loss.....	12
Section 4: Saying Goodbye .....	21
Section 5: Coping .....	33
Additional Resources.....	36
Final Remarks .....	37
Self-Feedback .....	38
References.....	39
About the Developer.....	41

# Introduction to Workbook

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## *Goal and Objectives*

The goal of this workbook is to provide the knowledge and skills for foster parents who may be grieving the loss of children who had joined their families but had to leave either to meet the requirements of the court's permanency plan or other reasons.

The workbook's objectives are to:

- ❖ Understand what permanency is and why it is essential for children
- ❖ Understand why fostering is not a permanency option
- ❖ Understand the role of foster parents in helping children achieve permanency
- ❖ Understand the feelings and behaviors typically associated with grief and loss
- ❖ Understand "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process," with the aim of becoming "loss managers"
- ❖ Identify skills and activities that may help all foster family members, including parents and children manage the grieving process
- ❖ Recognize the benefits and rewards of children achieving permanency with family reunification as the first goal and then adoption
- ❖ Understand the valuable role that foster parents have in helping children achieve permanency as a way of becoming "loss managers"

*Please note that this workbook on loss does not take the place of talking with professionals who are trained in addressing feelings of sadness and perhaps anger. Please be certain to contact your agency's child welfare worker for support.*

# Getting Started

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## *How to Use the Workbook*

This workbook is organized into five different sections (wellness toolbox, foster care & permanency, understanding grief & loss, saying goodbye, and coping), with each section building upon each other. This workbook allows you to be both your own teacher and learner. As a self-directed workbook, you are expected to be able to facilitate your own learning and work at your own pace.

## *Materials Needed*

This workbook is designed to be an easy to follow workbook that requires you to only have a pen or pencil to fill in your answers for questions and make notes. The workbook is presented in a three-ring binder in order for you to add supplemental documents and resources that you believe will be helpful with your learning. The computer will be an additional material that is not required, however, it will be necessary to access supplemental resources.

# Section 1: Wellness Toolbox



# Activity: Toolbox Kit

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List any activities that you like to do and would like to try to help you calm down. Then keep adding new ones and/or crossing out ones you decide are not right for you. This will be useful as you complete the workbook. The next page will include some examples.

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# Example Toolbox Kit

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Journaling

Going for a walk

Exercising

Playing an instrument

Singing

Dancing

Reading a book

Listening to music

Spend time with friends

Shopping

Watch a movie

Pray

Sleep

Watch television

Do arts and crafts

# Activity: Social Support System

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Identify a list of people who you can turn to when you need support. This can include family members, friends, therapists, and social workers. This will be useful as you complete the workbook.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# **Section 2: Foster Care & Permanency**



# What is Foster Care and Permanency?

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## Foster Care

- ❖ Also known as out-of-home care
- ❖ Temporary service for children who cannot live with their parents
- ❖ Can refer to settings such as:
  - Group homes
  - Residential care facilities
  - Emergency shelters

## Permanency

- ❖ Giving and supporting lifelong family connections
- ❖ Provides a safe and stable environment where children can grow up and develop a life-long relationship with a nurturing caregiver
- ❖ Permanency can be achieved through:
  - Children reunifying with their families
  - Adoption
  - Guardianship
- ❖ Benefits
  - Children develop attachments to caregivers
  - A life-long relationship is formed
  - Children develop a continuous connection to family, traditions, culture, and ethnic heritage, religion, and language

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017;  
IFAPA, 2013)



# Family Reunification Facts

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- ❖ Refers to the process of joining children in temporary out-of-home placement back to their families of origin
- ❖ It is the most common goal for children in out-of-home placement
- ❖ During the fiscal year of 2015-2016, 55% of children returned to a parent or caregiver

## Involvement of Foster Parents

- ❖ Foster parents can facilitate family reunification through:
  - Supporting the children's visits with parents
  - Letting the children talk to their family, as per court order
- ❖ Develop a positive relationship with the birth parents

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011;  
U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services, 2016)



## Activity: Family Permanency

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From the list, check off how you have helped promote and support family reunification with the birth family.

- Bringing children to visits or family time with parents, siblings, relatives
- Supporting the children to go to visits or family time
- Helping the children make phone calls to family members
- Develop a positive relationship with the birth parents
- Attend team meetings to discuss the children's service plan.

If there is anything else that is missing, please write it below.

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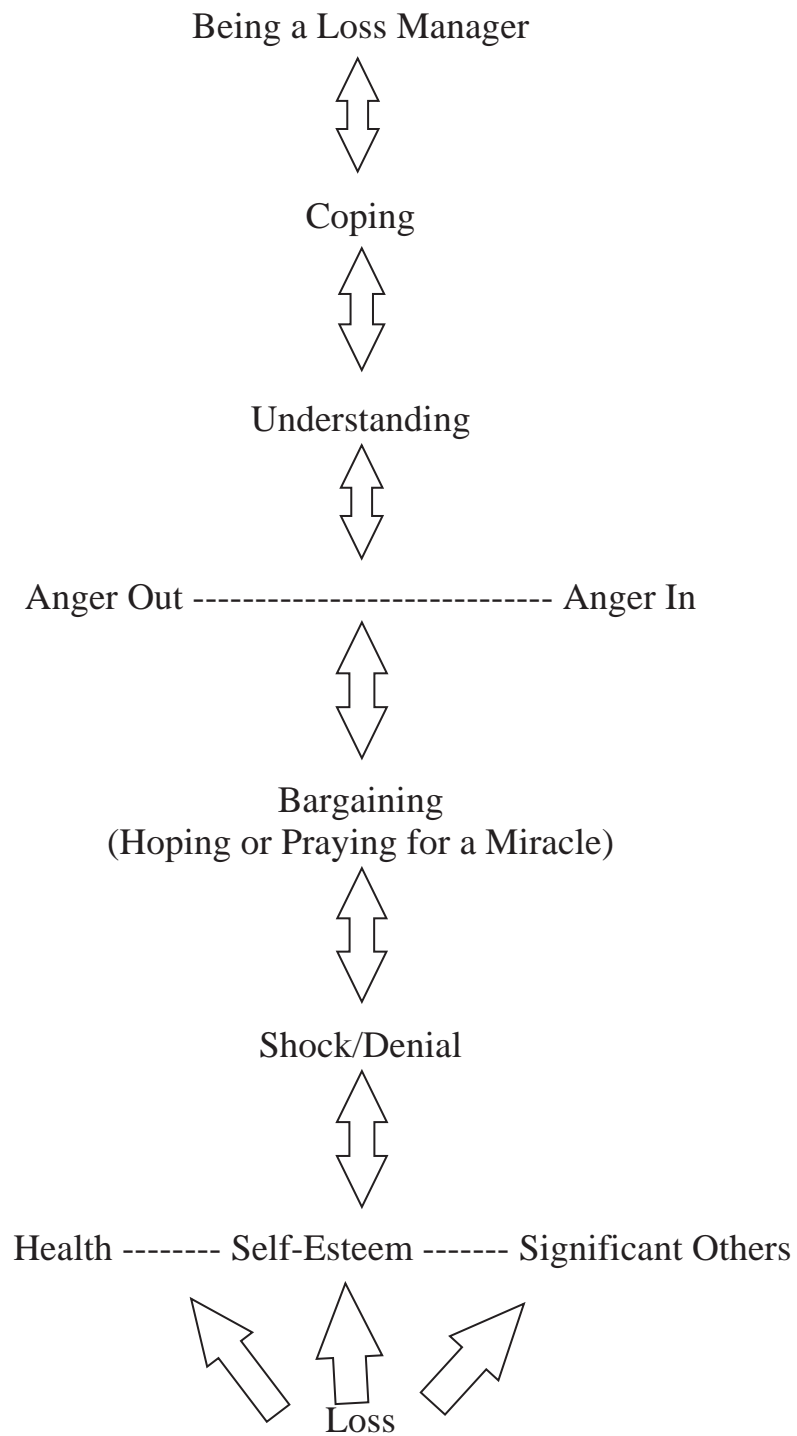
The next section may be difficult for some parents. You are welcome to take a break, perhaps do some of the activities that you identified on your toolbox kit on page 4. Whenever you are ready, please begin the next section.

# Section 3: Understanding Grief and Loss



# The Pathway Through the Grieving Process

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(Pasztor, 2009)

**THE PATHWAY THROUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS:**  
**BEING A LOSS MANAGER**

**Helping Children with Loss and Grief \***

The “The Pathway Through the Grieving Process” is one of the most important “best practices tools” used in the *PRIDE Model of Practice* to develop and support resource (foster and adoptive) parents as team members in child protection. (**PRIDE** is an acronym for **P**arent **R**esources for **I**nformation, **D**evelopment, and **E**ducation, published by the Child Welfare League of America – [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)). “Resource Parent” recognizes that foster and adoptive families make a 24-hour a day contribution to the well-being of the children who join their families. A model of practice means that resource parents and staff work together to achieve the same vision, mission, goal, objectives, and outcomes. This is achieved by using “best practices tools” such as this “Pathway Through the Grieving Process.” Here is how it works:

Imagine that your family has completed the licensing, certification, or approval process and you are ready to have a child join your family. Your agency contacts you about a little girl, Amanda (not her real name), not quite five years old, and living on the streets with her teen-age mother, who was hospitalized for mental distress. With no known relatives to take Amanda, your family’s “Map” and “Clock” (other *PRIDE* tools) determine that Amanda could be protected and nurtured (the first *PRIDE* competency category) by your family. You also have discussed what was known about Amanda from the “Jigsaw Puzzle” perspective (another *PRIDE* tool). Based on these initial assessments, it is decided by your family and the agency that your family and Amanda are a good match.

The next step is to think about how to gain Amanda’s trust and help her attach to your family (another *PRIDE* tool), because attachment is so important. Here is where the “Pathway through the Grieving Process” comes in and how it works. You read it from the bottom up.

Look for the word **LOSS** at the bottom of the diagram and then, above it, **HEALTH, SELF-ESTEEM, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS**. This shows that there are three kinds of losses that children and adults can experience. Amanda has experienced all three kinds of losses. On the left, she had **health** losses because of neglect (not enough food, no medical or dental care, and physical pain from what might be burns from playing with cigarettes and matches.) On the right, she had **significant others** losses because she was separated from her mother to whom she is attached, even though her mother was not able to protect her and keep her safe. The middle word, **self-esteem**, is another typical loss: Amanda feels bad about herself because she thinks she did something wrong when she was separated from her mother. At her little girl age of just four years, she cannot understand all the strangers who have come into her life.

When Amanda comes to your family, she may be quiet and withdrawn. This can be the **SHOCK/DENIAL** stage; children can be confused by what is happening and all the changes. Next they may move to **BARGAINING**, or **HOPING OR PRAYING FOR A MIRACLE**. She may believe that if she is on her best behavior her mother will come for her. It is not that she

does not like your family, but she does not know you. Even though your family may try hard to comfort and reassure Amanda that she is safe with you and you want to take care of her, she may not believe you. When her mother does not come for her, she may begin to express her anger. She may begin to “test” your family and see if you will keep her even when she misbehaves.

When Amanda travels the “pathway” to the **ANGER** stage, this can go to the outward expression of feelings or the inward expression. Outward might be that Amanda has temper tantrums, refuses to follow directions, perhaps she stops getting along with other children. Or Amanda may withdraw, turning her angry feelings on herself; she may be depressed, cry, whine, act fearful, and have trouble sleeping and eating. Fortunately, your family is learning that your foster parenting task is to help her, first, feel protected and nurtured. You must talk gently with her and be consistent. You will let her know that it is okay to feel mad, bad, and sad because she misses her mother and it is okay to feel angry, too. Amanda may need play therapy to **UNDERSTAND** at her young age that grown-ups are trying to help her mother and her. Meanwhile, she is safe and welcomed with your family.

With support from your agency’s social worker, your family can show Amanda some “okay ways” to express sad, bad, mad feelings. The next step on the “Pathway” is to help Amanda **COPE** with the losses in her young life. This is different for each child and requires teamwork between all the members of Amanda’s child welfare team: the Resource Family and the social worker, along with others, perhaps a play therapist. They will show her some okay ways to express those feelings. Eventually, hopefully, Amanda may become what is known as a **LOSS MANAGER**. A survivor from abuse and neglect, even as a little girl.

Here are several additional important points to think about regarding the “Pathway.”

(1) See how the arrows go up and down. This is because none of us travel the “Pathway” just once. We can go back and forth from **UNDERSTANDING** to **ANGER** to **BARGAINING** to **DENIAL**, and then start over again. This can be caused by another loss of health, significant others, or self-esteem especially – when people hurt our feeling and let us down. Also, we do not travel the “pathway” in a particular order. we can experience the reactions to loss in any order.

(2) Resource Parents and agency staff must talk together about **LOSS**. Like most pathways, this is best traveled together, as a team.

(3) The *PRIDE Model of Practice* has an expression known as “parallel process.” This means that what children experience, we as adults experience, too. Your Family Development Specialist will talk with you about your own experiences with **LOSS** and how you may have traveled the *Pathway Through the Grieving Process* and perhaps become a loss manager yourself.

(Pasztor, 2009)

## Activity: Identifying Feelings

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Identify your feelings associated with the list of things that were lost or misplaced on the left side and write down how you were feeling on the right. A list of feelings will be available for you on the next page.

Remote control

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Cell phone

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Keys

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Glasses/Sunglasses

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Pen/pencil

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Pet

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Electronic device

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Losing weight

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Clothes

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Chap stick/Lipstick/Lip balm

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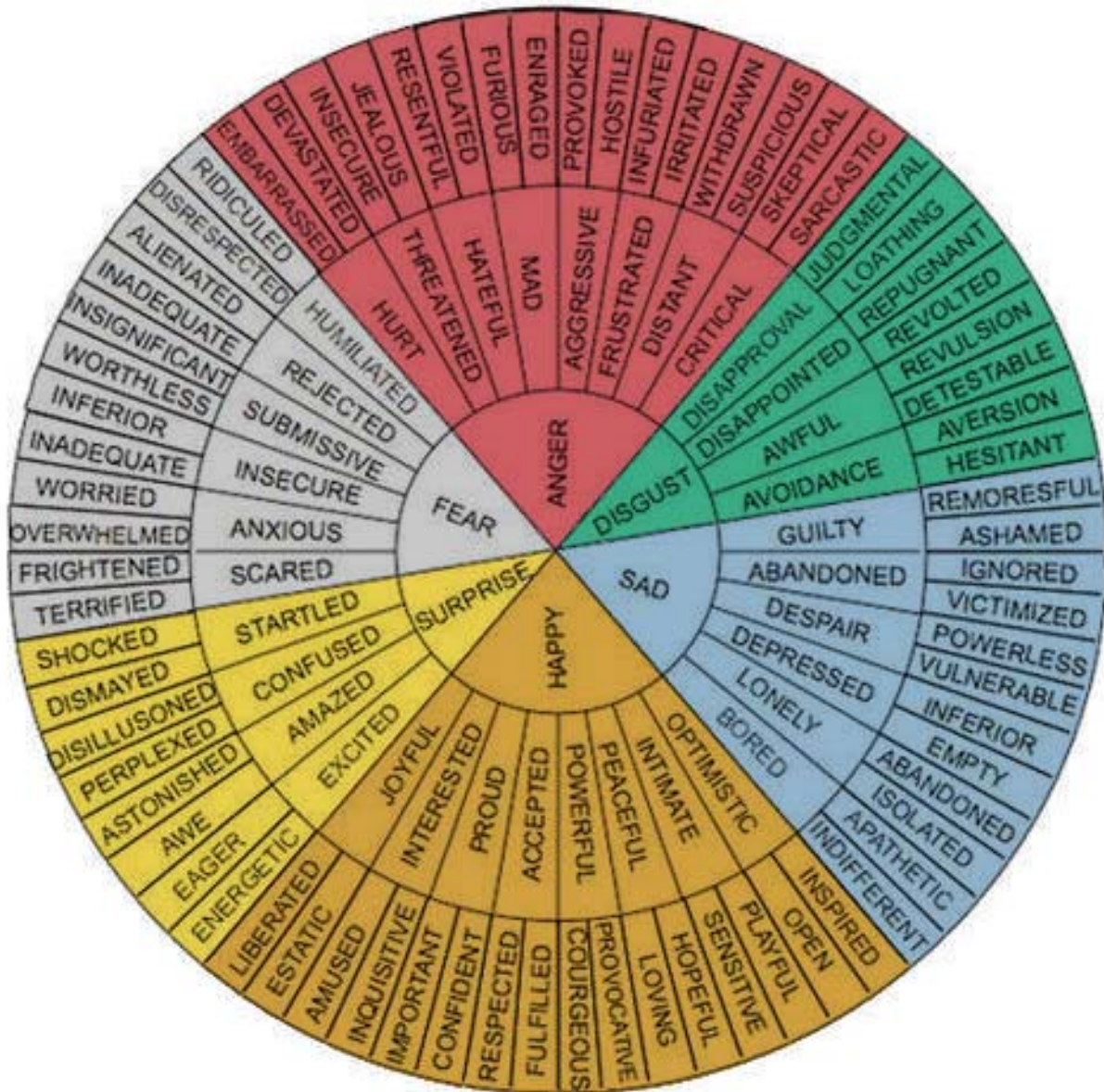
Money

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Jewelry

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# Feelings Chart



(Material from: Vocabulary.com)

# Feelings Associated With Grief and Loss

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Not all people cope with grief and loss the same way. Here are some of the most common feelings and experiences.

- ❖ Difficulty concentrating
- ❖ Numbness
- ❖ Irritability
- ❖ Weepiness
- ❖ Loss of appetite
- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Powerlessness
- ❖ Overwhelmed
- ❖ Experience sleep disturbances
- ❖ Guilt
- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Loneliness
- ❖ Apathy
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Tense
- ❖ Pain

(Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman, 2001)

# Factors Influencing How Foster Parents Grieve

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1. Characteristics of the foster parents and children relationship
  - ❖ Age of the children when they joined your family
    - Raising the children from infancy strengthens the bond between the foster parents and children
    - Foster parents can feel that they are the functional and psychological parents of the children and can find the loss of the children to be painful
  - ❖ Length of time with the family
    - Usually the longer the relationship lasts, the more severe the impact will be for both the children and the parents
  - ❖ Emotional fit
    - Was it a special match?
    - Ambivalence
      - Grieving can be prolonged and complicated if the foster parents feel uncertain about the children
    - Feelings of relief about the children leaving the family
2. Circumstances of the children's transition to and from placement
  - ❖ Was it well planned and a cooperative transition from one home to another?
  - ❖ Was it an abrupt unexpected move out of the home?
  - ❖ Was it a move where the foster parents have concerns about the children?

(Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman, 2001)



The next section may be difficult for some parents. You are welcome to take a break, perhaps do some of the activities that you identified on your toolbox kit on page 4. Whenever you are ready, please begin the next section.

# Section 4: Saying Goodbye



## **Note to Participants**

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Saying goodbye to children you took care of is never an easy task. In this section, activities and strategies are offered for how you can help yourself and your family say goodbye and talk about how they are feeling about the loss. Also, the activities will help to promote a healthy and positive transition for your family.



# Identify Feelings Each Member of the Family Has

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As identified in the previous section, each person grieves differently depending on their age and the attachment to the children that are leaving. In this activity, talk with your family and have them identify the feelings that they have about the children leaving the home. A list of feelings is included on page 21. If there are more people involved that are not listed, use the blank lines to add their names on it.

**Yourself**

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**Partner or Spouse**

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**Birth Children**

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**Grandparents**

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**Aunts and Uncles**

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# Heartfelt Feelings Strategy

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**Purpose:** To express your feelings regarding children leaving your family and have open communication to your support system.

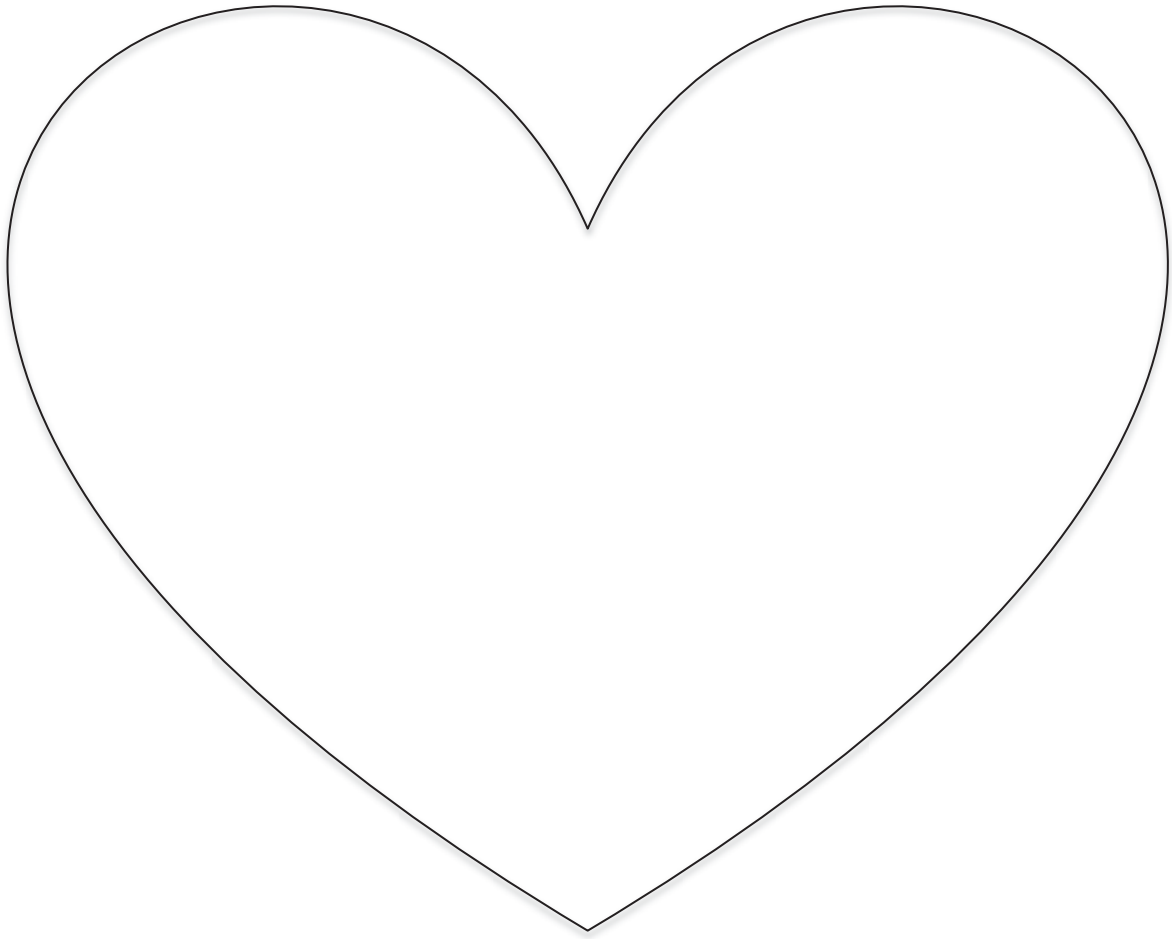
**Materials:** “Heartfelt Feelings Strategy” Printout, markers, crayons

**Directions:**

1. Think about your feelings regarding ending the relationship with the children you have cared for and become attached to.
2. Choose four colors that match each of your feelings and write down those feelings on the lines provided on the printout.
3. With each of those feelings identified, color in the heart with how much of each feeling you are feeling about ending the relationship.
4. After filling in the chart, you will be able to see how you are feeling about saying goodbye. You can discuss those feelings with the people you have identified in your social support system on page 6.

NOTE: This can also be completed with all family members. Each person will need their own Heartfelt Feeling Strategy printout and it is found on the next page. If completed with your family, have each person share their feelings and worksheet to the family.

(Gil & Crenshaw, 2016)



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# Puzzles

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**Purpose:** To express positives about children you cared for.

**Materials:** Blank puzzle pieces, markers, zip lock bag

**Directions:**

1. Think of some positives about the children you cared for, such as their appearance, personality, or an activity you did together.
2. Write these examples on each of the puzzle pieces.
3. Consider at all of your positive experiences.
4. Keep the puzzle for yourself.

NOTE: This activity can be completed with your family. If you are doing this with your family, on one side of the puzzle piece write their name and on the other side, write the comment. This way, you and your family are able to associate who wrote what.



(Terry, 2011)



# The Worry Tree

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**Purpose:** To allow yourself to have concerns about the children who are no longer with you.

**Materials:** drawing paper (optional), pens/pencil/markers, leaves, scissors, glue/tape

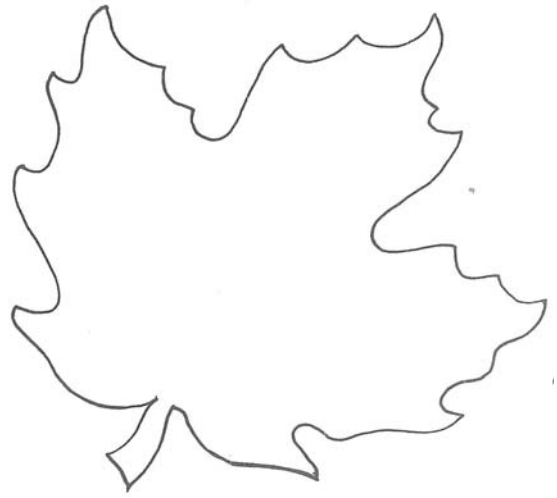
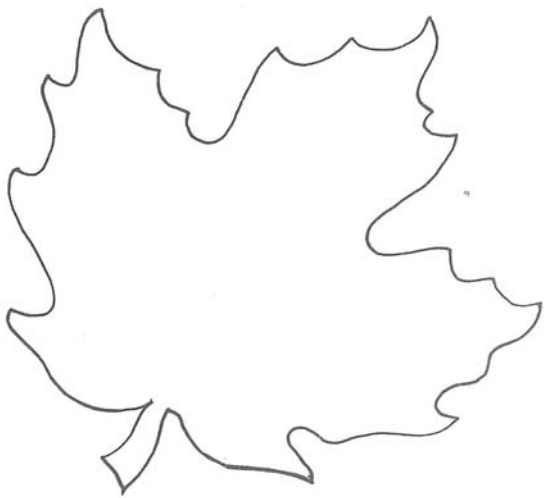
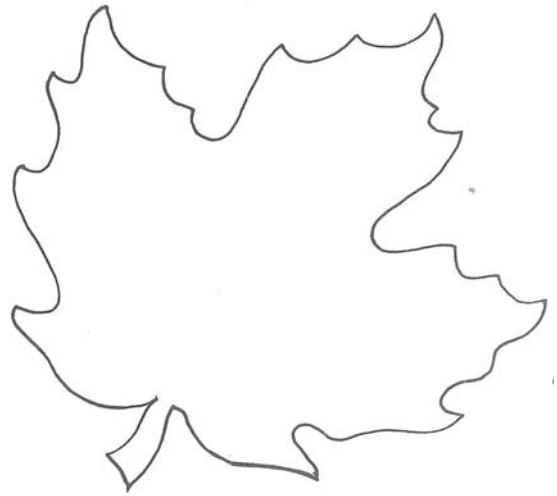
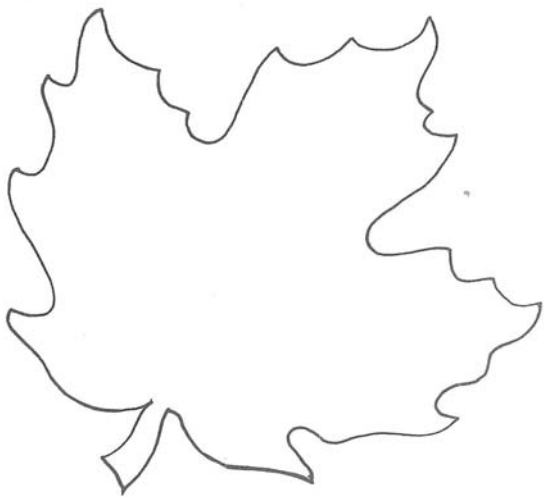
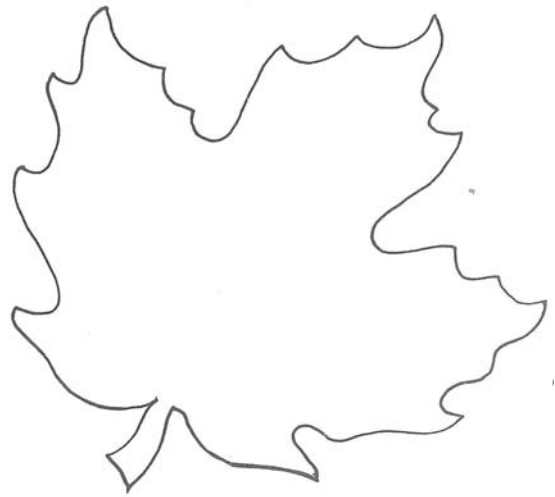
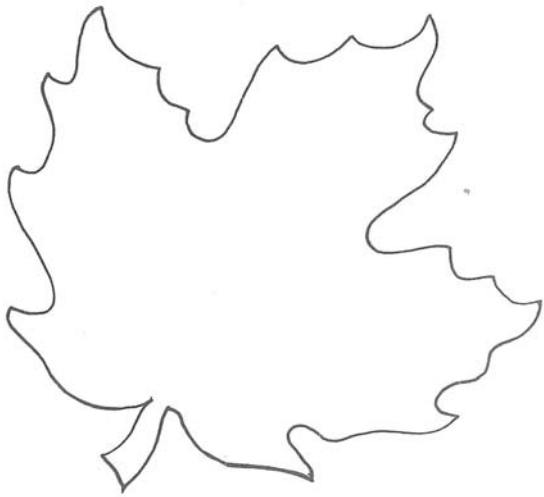
**Directions:**

1. Think about all of the worries you have about children you cared for leave your home.
2. Write those worries on the leaves. If you are creative, you can also represent your worries using symbols, words, colors, or images. Cut the leaves.
3. Draw or print out a tree then place the leaves with your worries and stick them on the tree.
4. Take a step back and see what your worries are about the children leaving your home. Take time to process those worries and find ways to help you address them. You can use this time discuss those feelings to your support system listed on page 6.

NOTE: This can also be completed with your family.



(Wrench & Naylor, 2013)



# Memory Box

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Everyone with whom there has been an attachment leaves an impact in our lives, sometimes or happy and sometimes not. Now, think about the children who have left your family and make a list of items of ways in which you will remember them. This can include pictures, teddy bears, letters, clothes, blankets, artwork that was created them, etc. As foster parents, the children you took care of have become a part of your life and family, even if they are not present with you. This activity will help you reminisce about the children and remember memories that you have had with them.

NOTE: You can work on this by yourself, or with your family. If working with your family, have each member bring and share some kind of memory and place it into the memory box.



(Steen & Foster, 2011)

# Letters

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**Purpose:** To promote healthy transitions and saying goodbye

**Materials:** paper, pen/pencil, envelope (optional)

**Directions:**

1. Think about what you would like the children who have left your care to be feeling about their time with you.
2. Make a list of those feelings and write them down on a piece of paper.
3. Give that letter to the children (optional).

NOTE: For some people, creating a letter and writing down their goodbyes can help aid in a healthy way to process their feelings.

# Section 5: Coping



# Coping with the Loss of a Child in Care

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As foster parents, you have opened your hearts and family to children. Often you have accepted children, who have many issues to deal with and taken on the large task of teaching them to trust, love, care and become responsible or independent by patterning such behavior for them. You may or may not have developed close bonds. Children who leave your home can be difficult for both yourself and your family. There is no way that separation can be made easy and painless. The following are suggestions for making the separation as positive an experience as possible.

## ***For Children that are Leaving***

- Give children permission to express their feelings
- In addition to accepting children's feelings, help them identify them
- Talk straight to the children about why they are leaving and where they are going
- Make a life book or souvenir box
- Share information about the children with the social worker so the best plan can be made for the children's next placement
- Give the children permission to leave you
- Do not let the children "make" you reject them

## ***For Your Own Children***

- Talk straight with your own children about the move and why
- Give them permission to identify and express their feelings about the move
- Communicate the positive aspects of the change
- Allow your children to grieve

## ***For Yourself***

- Take time to sort out your feelings and think about where they are coming from
- Allow yourself time to grieve
- Talk to someone about your feelings
- Ask the children's social worker to involve you in the planning process and keep you informed of developments as they occur

(Material Adapted from: "Saying Goodbye: Separation and Loss Issues for Foster Parents.")

## **You Know You Are “Becoming a Loss Manager” When You**

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- ❖ Can laugh and enjoy being with others.
- ❖ Take care of yourself.
- ❖ Can think about the children without being sad.
- ❖ Want to reach out to others in need or pain.
- ❖ Enjoy activities that you had given up.
- ❖ Share funny memories without crying.
- ❖ Recognize your emotional roller coaster is slowing down.
- ❖ Can actually see the progress you’ve made.

CAUTION: Don’t get alarmed if you’re suddenly feeling the pain of grief again. This doesn’t mean you are regressing; these feelings will come up from time to time when you least expect them.

(Material Adapted from: “Saying Goodbye: Separation and Loss Issues for Foster Parents.”)

## Additional Resources

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### **The Just in Time Webshow 1 Episode 3 (S3): “The One About Grief and Loss Foster Families Experience”**

**By: Quality Parenting Initiative**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM1wqfrpZ5c&t=29s>

In this episode, host Lora Diaz talks with foster and adoptive parent, foster parent advocate, and trainer Dania Guzman about the loss and grief that families have when a child leaves the home.



### **Saying Goodbye Foster Care 2014**

**By: nsgov**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5MI29ELUko>

Parents talk about their experience saying goodbye to the foster child they were taking care of and their feelings associated with it.



### **UCLA TIES for Families L.I.F.T. Program (Loss Interventions for Families in Transition)**

<https://www.uclahealth.org/Mattel/ties-for-families/>

Main: (310) 825-6110

This free program helps support foster/resource families hoping to adopt who are facing pending removal of a child to reunification or replacement with a family member or have had a child reunified with a birth family.

Services include: short-term grief counseling and grief support group services

### **Online Support Groups**

In addition to all of the resources listed above, there are various online support groups available for foster parents. One of these online support groups is found at:

<https://www.dailystrength.org/group/foster-care>

## Final Remarks

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this workbook. I hope that it has helped you and perhaps your family grieve and transition the loss. Remember that being a “loss manager” is not a one-time experience; most of us travel the pathway many times. Please use the Wellness Toolbox in Section1 when you feel you need support. Best wishes and thank you again for your commitment to child welfare.

*As stated at the beginning of this workbook, this workbook on loss does not take the place of talking with professionals who are trained in addressing feelings of sadness and perhaps anger. Please be certain to contact your agency’s child welfare worker for support.*

# Self-Feedback

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Here is an opportunity to give feedback to yourself on how helpful this workbook was for you. Please circle the number that best describes your opinion. It is hoped that you strongly agree with these statements, if not, think about where you might go to receive to get extra support.

1. The workbook addressed the topic of grief and loss in an organized manner.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I found the information easy to follow.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Overall, this workbook was useful to me.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I would recommend this workbook to other foster parents/families.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

## Comments and Suggestions:

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## About the Developer

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