

## Tools for Engaging Youth and Families in Permanency Planning

- **Appreciative Inquiry.** This strength-based technique involves asking questions about positive experiences as a way of building on what is already working well. Use this approach when communicating with young people in care, as well as with birth parents, foster parents, and other adults to identify new strengths, opportunities and possibilities.
- **Person-Centered Planning.** This approach was originally developed as a way of engaging people with disabilities, regarding decisions about important matters that directly affect their lives. When applied to youth in foster care, person-centered (or teen-centered) planning allows the young person to take the lead in creating a plan of action in collaboration with the significant people in his/her life.
- **Foster Care Groups.** When youth in care connect with each other, and with foster care alumni, it opens up new and different perspectives about the importance of permanency. By sharing common experiences, many youth come to realize that they are not to blame for their situations, nor are they “abnormal” and therefore not deserving of permanency. Several organizations such as California Youth Connection ([www.cal youthconn.org](http://www.cal youthconn.org)), Foster Club ([www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com)), and Foster Care Alumni of America ([fostercarealumni.org](http://fostercarealumni.org)) facilitate support groups for youth.
- **Family Group Decision Making/Family Group Conferencing.** This practice brings family members (as identified by the youth) into the decision-making process for a young person. A key aspect of this approach is the provision of private family time, when all of the professionals leave the room. This allows the family an opportunity to develop a plan together and empowers them to create solutions that work for their specific situation (i.e., action plans that are more culturally competent). Additional information is available at: [www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/family-group-decision-making/](http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/family-group-decision-making/)
- **Family Team Meetings.** Similar to *Family Group Decision Making*, but usually doesn't involve private family time.
- **Life Books.** This concrete record of a child's life (i.e., photos, artwork, report cards, memories/quotes from people they know, family history, a list of previous residences, past relationships, etc.) can be very grounding and help ease transitions as a young person joins a new, permanent family. This tool also allows youth in care to let go of the negative aspects of their past, while retaining positive memories. Life books also signal that the young person's life is important enough to document.
- **Inclusion of Youth at Court Hearings:** It is a federal requirement for the court to consult directly with the child (in an age appropriate way) regarding his/her permanency options. This enables the young person to feel more in control of their own situation, rather than simply being told what will happen to them after the fact.