Bridging the Gap – 1 hour

## What is Bridging the Gap?

Bridging the Gap is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between the birth and foster families involved in a youth’s life, or between the foster and adoptive families. The goal of Bridging the Gap is to support family reunification or another permanency plan.

## Why Bridging the Gap?

Tthe purpose of foster care is to retain the connection between children and families so that children can be reunited with their birth families with minimal trauma. Bridging the Gap includes the concept of foster families and birth families communicating with respect and sharing information. This communication benefits the foster parents, parents, and the children.

## Benefits of Bridging the Gap:

1. Opportunity to preserve the child’s sense of identity and history
2. Child’s bonding and attachment to birth family is preserved
3. Child has a decreased sense of abandonment and rejection
4. Child has a smoother transition into and out of foster care
5. Child sees the birth parents and foster parents are united for his/her benefit.
6. Child has reduced issues with divided loyalties
7. Birth parents share information to help the foster parents
8. Foster parents model their parenting behavior for birth parents
9. Foster parents have a better understanding of the child’s past
10. Foster parents may maintain their relationship with the child after foster care

Icebreaker Meetings

An Icebreaker Meeting provides an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents to meet and talk about the child’s needs. The birth and foster parents share information about themselves and their family routine and traditions. Icebreaker meetings are most effective when they occur early in the child’s placement. The child’s DFS social worker facilitates the meeting, which may last about 30 minutes, and takes place at the county DFS office.

## Watch this 18-minute video about Icebreaker Meetings and the importance of Bridging the Gap:

[http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={8BC08335-EA62-4262-9D0E-7CDCCF962006}](http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid=%7b8BC08335-EA62-4262-9D0E-7CDCCF962006%7d)

## 10 Tips for Foster Parents to Support Youth During Icebreaker Meetings

1. Remember that the meeting is all about the child/youth.

2. Talk to the child/youth prior to the meeting and ask if he or she has any questions or concerns.

3. During the meeting, ask the child/youth if he or she has any questions about you or your family.

4. Be sensitive to the child/youth during the meeting.

5. Remain calm and positive throughout the meeting.

6. Allow the child/youth and the bio parent to share what they think is important about their family before asking any questions you may have.

7. Be mindful of the child/biological-parent dynamic and avoid the parent role.

8. Try not to be judgmental when the child/youth or biological parent shares information about routines, family structure, parenting style, etc. even if you do not agree with them.

9. Show interest in the child/youth and show that you want to understand his or her likes/dislikes.

10. Be supportive of the child/youth and the biological parent during the meeting and reassure them that you are all working together as a team.

*Information taken from* [*http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/ChildWelfarePermanence/IcebreakerMeetings.aspx*](http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/ChildWelfarePermanence/IcebreakerMeetings.aspx)*.*

***Answer these below questions and email them to*** ***Tspeight@nvfs.org*** ***or*** ***MPalanci@nvfs.org*** ***to receive credit for this training.***

1. How can foster parents and birth parents communicating and respecting each other help children in foster care?
2. How can your NVFS social worker support you through the Bridging the Gap process?
3. What are some ways you can Bridge the Gap with birth families of your foster children?
4. According to the 18-minute Icebreaker/Bridging the Gap video, what negative things can happen when the foster parent and birth parent do not have the opportunity to work together?