

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN CHILD GUIDANCE

Larry's progress in therapy was slow in the first few months. So great had been his deprivation in his relationships with his parents that he had withdrawn into a world alone, seeking to find a self without relationships since none which he had were meeting his needs as a person. Because a child can develop a sense of his own being, however, only in relation to others, Larry's separation of himself without support from parents was leading to complete disassociation. As Larry gradually began to find himself in relation to another person in therapy, his parents were becoming ready to accept his beginning expression of himself with them, however negative that expression might be. The momentum increased as child and parents found, in relation to each other, response to, stimulation for, and reassurance of change in themselves. Although Larry had some innate limitations of personality and ability, Mr. and Mrs. K were able to relate to him, to accept him as he was, and to appreciate his development and change which was dramatic in relation to his capacity.

In this case we have the triangle of family relationships—father, mother and child directly involved in the process of change. It demonstrates that service to a troubled child, however strong he may be, must involve the direct and integrated service to each person within this relationship. Parents and children as they come to us today encompass what they are as persons and what they have become through the two-way impact in relationships within the family group.

The case work job in a child guidance clinic is therefore focused on the dynamics of the parents' relationships with their child. This involves the knowledge that the individual's identity and his selfhood must emerge from his relatedness. The self has no meaning except as it becomes that in relation to others. Case work utilizes the very force of the interrelatedness and interdependence of the individuals within the family constellation as the core of the process through which parents are assisted in growing up to the responsibilities of parenthood.

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN FOSTER HOME PLACEMENT\*

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WHEN a parent comes to the placement agency saying, "Help me with the care of my child," he is presenting only a part of his problem; that part which has become so crucial that it is impossible for him to carry it alone any longer. In that respect he is not different from the parent who asks the Child Guidance Clinic for help with his son who is failing at school, or the client who asks the Family Agency for a housekeeper. We know the specific problem is related to far deeper difficulty in living than the client may easily acknowledge. The applicant to a placement agency has already experienced or is contemplating the breakdown of his family. The burden of fear and guilt and failure that is involved has a specific nature, because for most human beings it is of deep concern that their children should be looked after within the family group.

Parents who ask for placement cannot accomplish this, usually because they are having serious difficulty in their family relationships. They come explaining the need for placement as due to desertion, constant quarreling, inadequacies in carrying the role of husband, wife, or parent. If the immediate reason for placement is illness or death of one parent, it remains true that there is no

relative who offers to take in this particular youngster, at least not in a way that the parent requesting placement can accept.

In the application for placement then there is the implication that the parent cannot carry out his most primary social and biological responsibility, that of caring for his offspring. It suggests a serious and far reaching failure in his own eyes and in the eyes of the community. As agencies, we have come to understand that it need not mean his total and permanent failure as a parent but may well carry within itself the beginning of a new approach to his responsibility. The placement experience will determine whether the parent can find in himself the will and strength to reunite his family. The answer lies partly with the parent and partly with the agency, and its way of carrying the responsibility for the services given. Just as in relief giving, where the service may be either helpful or destructive, so it is in child placement.

The child care agency in accepting the child into foster care would seem, therefore, to accept a two-fold obligation, one to provide care for the child and the other to offer help with the problem behind this immediate need. The concrete service is to provide for the child an experience in foster home living that is as wholesome and as growth producing as agency resources, under-

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standing and skills can make possible. This is no small responsibility in itself.

The child who comes into placement is in need of the most sensitive understanding and skillful help. A proper home must have been already found for this particular child and prepared for his coming. The process that carries him through the traumatic separation from his parents and into the foster home is undertaken responsibly and thoughtfully. The adjustment in the foster home takes place slowly with many ups and downs. There may be a great deal of medical care at the start and perhaps school is also a matter of concern. Help must be offered to the child with his complicated feelings about his parents who placed him and his foster parents who represent a substitute relationship for which the child must become willing. Meantime, the worker is aware of the parent's relatedness to the beginning phase of placement. The triangular aspect comes sharply into focus as visiting begins posing for the worker the problem of offering help to parent, foster parent and child, with the hope that in time there will be enough balance in their interrelationship to let the child make a healthy use of placement. If the child can do this, who would wonder that agency and worker feel a great deal has been accomplished, and that the function of the agency has been well carried out.

This, of course, may take some time to achieve. At those periods when the placement does not go well the worker must concern herself with this very actively, whether the main problem lies with the foster home or within the parent-child relationship, as so often happens. If the agency structure and procedures are clearly enough defined, if the worker has warmth, sensitivity and strength, and

can carry with comfort her role in the triangular relationship in placement, the agency can very frequently meet its obligation to provide good foster home care.

Through the relationship with the worker in a sustained process, which for some parents needs to be a long one, the parent has the opportunity to come sufficiently to terms with himself and his relationship to his child, so that he can carry the pain and the giving up in order that the child can make use of the relationships in the foster home. Hopefully, the parent becomes able to delegate enough of his rights and responsibilities to live comfortably with placement or can reassume his role fully by taking the child home. If the parent cannot do either, sometimes the agency can still meet the child's needs, without the parent's help, though this is much harder to do. However, when the parent prevents his child from having a constructive relationship with foster parents and agency, then placement cannot succeed. In those cases where the parent is psychotic, psychopathic, or so disorganized and inadequate as to be unable to participate in a case work relationship, the agency carries a quite different role from what it does with an adequate parent. It becomes necessary to assume a far greater responsibility for the child, sometimes acting in lieu of parent and sometimes acting to protect the child in his relationship to his parent.

I have not considered that this paper could deal with the problems presented by this group. Where the parent is unable or unwilling to take help with his role, carrying it so tenuously, so negatively or destructively that the child is unable to either have a relationship with him or end it, it is important for the agency to be clear as to the part it

plays here—making sure that its philosophy and attitudes do not contribute to the parent's inability to carry his role. We have perhaps much to accomplish in this area since we do find that when the agency can define its role and its responsibility clearly with the parent, can carry it positively, respecting fully his rights and needs, and understanding the nature of his problem, there are fewer parents who cannot take help.

In my agency, we have for some years now thought of placement as a necessary separation between parent and child, which can be focused toward their coming together in a new and more satisfying way. This in itself implies that in the interim the parent needs help with his problem. To this end we keep actively in touch with him and have made it part of our job to give him case work help with his feelings about his child and about the agency, and to evaluate with him the meaning of this partial relationship with his child, helping him to sustain it or end it as seems right for him. Helping a parent and child to use the services of the agency means helping them to live within their reality, and to grow through and beyond this experience. In becoming able to accept life in so painful and fundamental an aspect, greater strength and ability may be developed to adjust to life in other aspects. Helping in a placement agency is focused on the role of parenthood. As the parent works on this he necessarily works on other relationships bound up with it. The unmarried mother, in working on her needs and responsibilities in relation to surrendering her baby, may in doing this come to grips with her relationship to her mother, who is characteristically trying to hold her to a different plan. There is the widower who fights the agency for the

right to take his child for week-ends to his very disturbing parents-in-law. When he can finally see that his child needs consideration here and looks at his motives, he says maybe he has never considered himself enough either. He is not this obligated to his parents-in-law, for he has paid them out in full long ago.

I would like here to present a case in more detail, showing how the agency takes responsibility in helping a parent.

Mr. Klug is separated from his wife, whom he considers unreliable and disinterested in their son, Philip, a boy of 6½. Mr. Klug, in applying to us, denied his ability to locate his wife, which we felt was related to his desire to exclude her. The conflict between them was a deep one, which must have hurt so bitterly that this otherwise unaggressive man could say with satisfaction that he had thrown her out.

Phil is well developed, bright, but oddly babyish. He is active, lovable, but also untidy, restless and insecure. Before placement it took a great deal of help by the worker for him to say he misses his mother and would like to see her. When the worker points out his conflicting loyalties, Mr. Klug helps by telling Philip that it is all right with him if he sees his mother when she is around.

When he is placed in his temporary foster home, Phil has little overt problem, seems busy and content, but is so unable to express feeling, that his worker is worried. His foster mother cannot get close to him. He will not discuss his mother again until the worker helps him to acknowledge that he is hurt because she stays away and that he knows that she could see him if she wanted to.

As Mr. Klug moves through the temporary period along with Phil and the worker, his problems are revealed and in

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connection with some he begins to take help. He is deeply tied to his son and conflicted in his wish to be both father and mother. He fights the agency for week-ends with his son and it is a landmark when he can say he really needs his week-ends for rest and relaxation from his arduous job and that Phil used to sometimes get in his way. He couldn't even give him proper physical care. His guilt for the mother he gave Phil is expressed when he tells the worker how he had always sent gifts to the boy in his mother's name. He has conflict over his whole relationship to women, swinging from contempt to overidealization. This comes out clearly in his relationship to the worker and has to be handled before he can have an appropriate working relationship with her.

The situation becomes more dynamic after the worker says Phil cannot go to a long time home until he gets more straightened out with his mother. He is being a most uncaring, indifferent little boy, shut off in a kind of vacuum.

By this time Mrs. Klug is back in town and asking Mr. Klug if she can see Phil. Mr. Klug is sure her interest is only a means of restoring their marriage. There are two interviews here without any movement, since he is afraid she will drop out gain and Phil will lose his idealization of his mother and be more hurt than ever. She might even arrive drunk. The worker feels it is better for Phil to find out now if he cannot count on his mother; then he can stop dreaming and perhaps be able to reach out for a beginning with a foster mother. Mr. Klug can not see this. It is obvious that he is fearful that he may get pulled back into a renewed relationship with his wife. There is a little taking hold by Mr. Klug when the worker touches upon his fear that Phil's disappointment in his mother will bring disappointment

in his father too. At any rate, to be angry at his mother and yet idealize her confuses Phil badly. Mr. Klug comes back to a third interview saying he is ready now to bring Phil's mother in, because now he is thinking of remarriage, and he wants Phil to be able to see his mother realistically so that he can take on his step-mother. When the worker reminds him how long he has fought her on this very thing, there is a moment of sharing and laughter between them. It almost seems now that he is hoping Phil's mother will drop out so that the boy will be ready for a step-mother. Mr. Klug denies this. He is not that sure of marriage. He has come this far before with other women and then broken off. He expresses much distrust of himself in this new relationship, does not want to make a second mistake, and besides has come to enjoy his freedom. But he wants a settled life for Phil. It is an important step for him when he can affirm not only Phil's need but his own wish now for a better, more solid marriage relationship. He knows he must go very slowly and he does need a long-time home for Phil. Later he brings in Mrs. Klug who gains in status with the worker's acceptance of her part in this placement. She expresses the discomfort she has been feeling as mother, saying that she had decided Mr. Klug could give Phil more than she could and she had just dropped out, somehow. But he is her child and she wants to see him. The first visits between Phil and his mother are awkward and formal, but Phil is proud as a peacock when she begins to visit in his foster home. Gradually he daydreams less, plays with the boys, and begins to confide in his foster mother. Both Mr. and Mrs. Klug carry themselves with real responsibility and mutual respect for each other in affirming to the worker

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their decision to remain apart and to visit separately so that Phil will not build up false hopes of their reunion. In the last recorded interview, Mrs. Klug speaks of her hope too that Phil can move to a long-time home now, where he can get more individualized care, and shyly she reminds the worker, that it is time for him to have new eye glasses. The worker is glad she has brought this up, because Phil's glasses really need to be tended to now. There is no question that Mrs. Klug is working at her part as mother.

Bringing in Mrs. Klug came after Mr. Klug learned to trust the worker—who is a woman also and after the worker helped him straighten out his relationship to her. He found he could both give and get respect and consideration and began to express it in the manner in which he brought his wife in to see the worker. The worker's understanding of Phil's problem, shared with Mr. Klug, stimulated him to think about his role as parent and what he wants to be in his relationship with his child. From this he was able to recognize that he has needs apart from his child, and in turn, could see his son as a separate individual with his own needs. He realizes he cannot be everything to Philip and that he has a life of his own that must be fulfilled. He can be freer now to see if he can find that fulfillment, and how Phil fits in with it.

I think this material shows how help is given to this parent through the placement process. The worker focuses on Phil's problem and his needs, and on what she must require of Mr. Klug if those needs are to be met. In his response to what is asked of him as a father, he expresses parts of his conflict. It is impossible to touch upon his problem in parenthood without touching on his feelings about himself as a man, a

husband, a client. The worker knows his problem can not be only in relation to his child. The control for worker and client lies in the conditions upon which the agency can offer its service—its requirement that he carry his role with his child as sensitively and responsibly as he can. The agency has a right to expect this because Phil, in living away from his parents, has problems with which he needs help and in order that he get this help, both Mr. and Mrs. Klug's way of carrying their roles is all important. Whether they are helpful or destructive or completely inactive profoundly affects Phil's ability to form the new relationships so necessary for his proper development. The worker's helpfulness depends on her ability to understand the unique problem created for this father by the placement service, notwithstanding his need for that service. She must hold to the realities of placement at each step, understanding Mr. Klug's struggle as he meets the necessary controls in the agency. He cannot take Phil home week-ends because this will only encourage the child's pattern of living in the foster home without participating in its life and relationships. He must seriously consider letting Phil see his mother and know her as she really is, otherwise Phil is blocked in forming a tie with his foster mother and the agency cannot serve him. The agency's focus as well as its right and responsibility do not lie in the totality of this parent's problem, but rather in the limited area of his relationship to his child and to the agency. This gives him a small and focused part to work on. Through the process with his worker he begins to see himself differently and acquires the ability to act in accordance with his own will. In this way, fundamental help can be given by the placement agency.