

Transitions for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Foster Care

Melissa Russell, Med, ESA, IMH-E® (III)

Mental Health Consultant, Puget Sound
Educational Service District (PSESD)



Training focus

This training will address the needs of infants and toddlers when talking about transitioning them between families: birth, foster and adoptive. The training will discuss the impact of developmental needs and trauma on transition and how the transition can impact all involved. A slow, well thought out transition can result in a successful transfer of attachment to the new family. A sudden, disruptive move can result in a child that has a very difficult time attaching to their new family and possibly impact their ability to form relationships in their future.

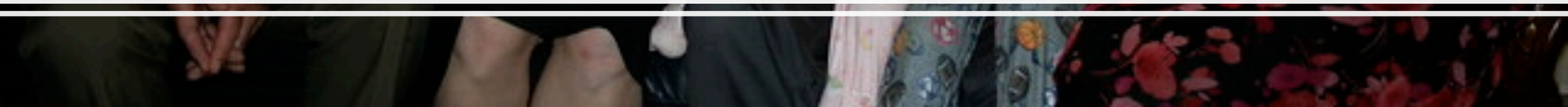



Change is hard on all
but especially on the
youngest of us.....





Transitions gone well





Infant Mental
Health-where
is the baby?
Wa-aimh.org

**Always hold the
child in mind**



Early Childhood Mental Health

- Video <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-mental-health-video/>

Definition

A transition is a bridge between the past, the present and the future. Ner Littner said in 1975, “Until he can establish roots in his present relationships, **we need to protect his roots to the past, no matter how deformed they may be**; without roots the child will die of emotional starvation. We build these bridges so that children can establish roots in their new relationships



Relationships

Can you take a few minutes and think of a relationship in your life that has meant a lot to you?

Who is that person? Why are they important? How did that relationship become so strong?

How would it feel to lose this individual with no warning and no longer have contact?



Relationships are key

Baby has relationships with.....

2 sets of parents/caregivers or more

Childcare provider

Transportors

Community members

Church members

Siblings

in home they live in

in home they originated from

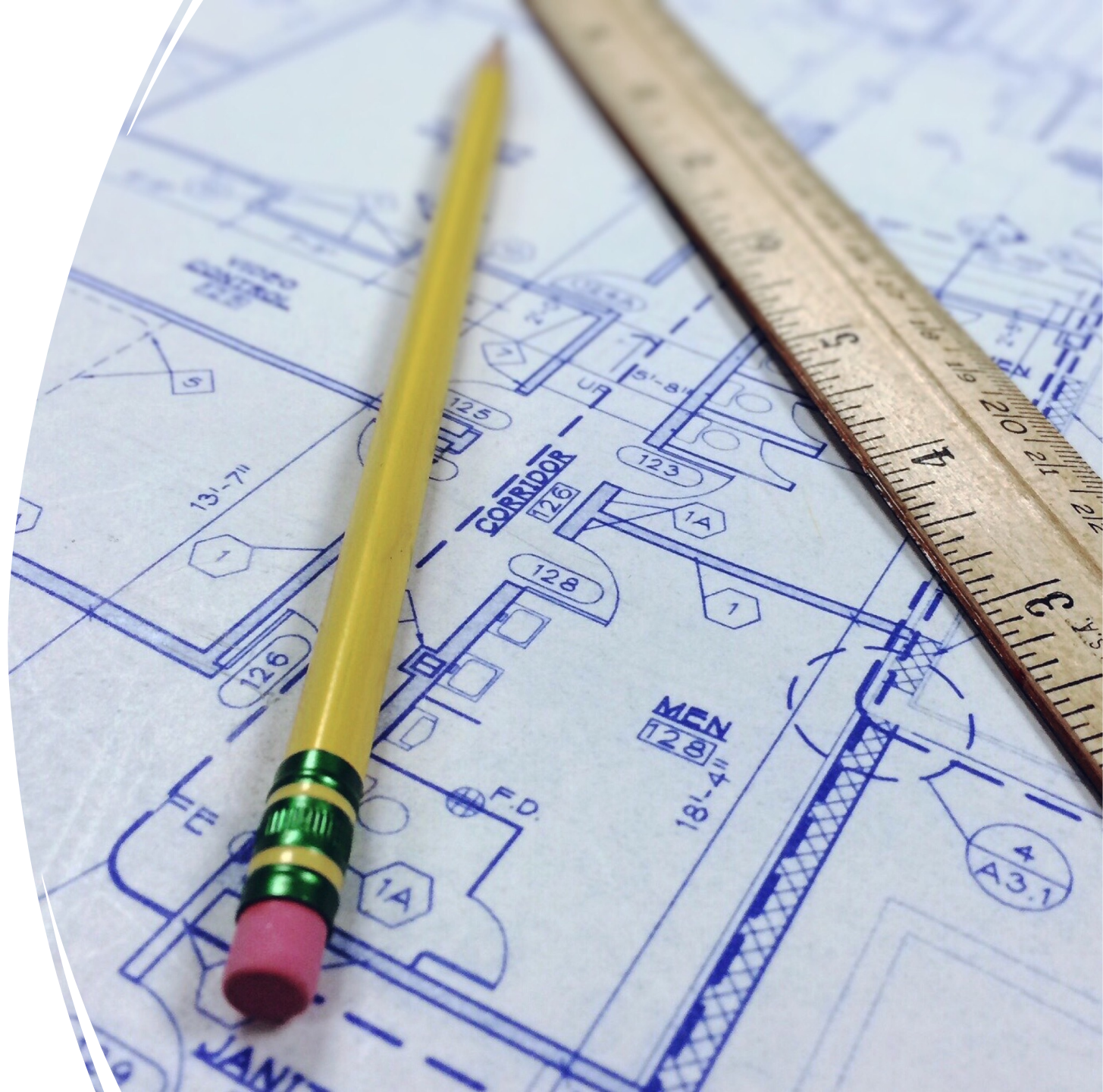


Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/toxic-stress-derails-healthy-development/>

Understanding trauma and its impacts

- Impact on brain development
- Impact on relationship blue print
- How to buffer for young children





Impact of abrupt separations on infants and toddlers.....

If we expect them to separate easily from a primary caregiver we have an unrealistic expectation.

Grief and Loss

Infancy

A child's major developmental task during infancy is establishing trust. When an infant experiences the profound loss of a parent or primary caregiver, the infant is at risk of losing his or her basic sense of trust in adults, and the world at large. Specific grief and loss related behaviors include crying loudly, withdrawal, apathy, and mournful crying. Foster parents can help reduce an infant's experience of loss by maintaining the infant's routines (as best as possible). Infants also find comfort in familiar smells – although sometimes it goes against our instincts not to wash all of the infant's belongings, it gives the infant a sense of security to keep something that smells of the infant's home.

A close-up photograph of a small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves growing out of a crack in a dark asphalt surface. The background is a blurred, light-colored ground with a prominent reddish-brown stain or crack on the right side. The overall scene symbolizes resilience and growth in a challenging environment.

Resiliency and how to mitigate ACES

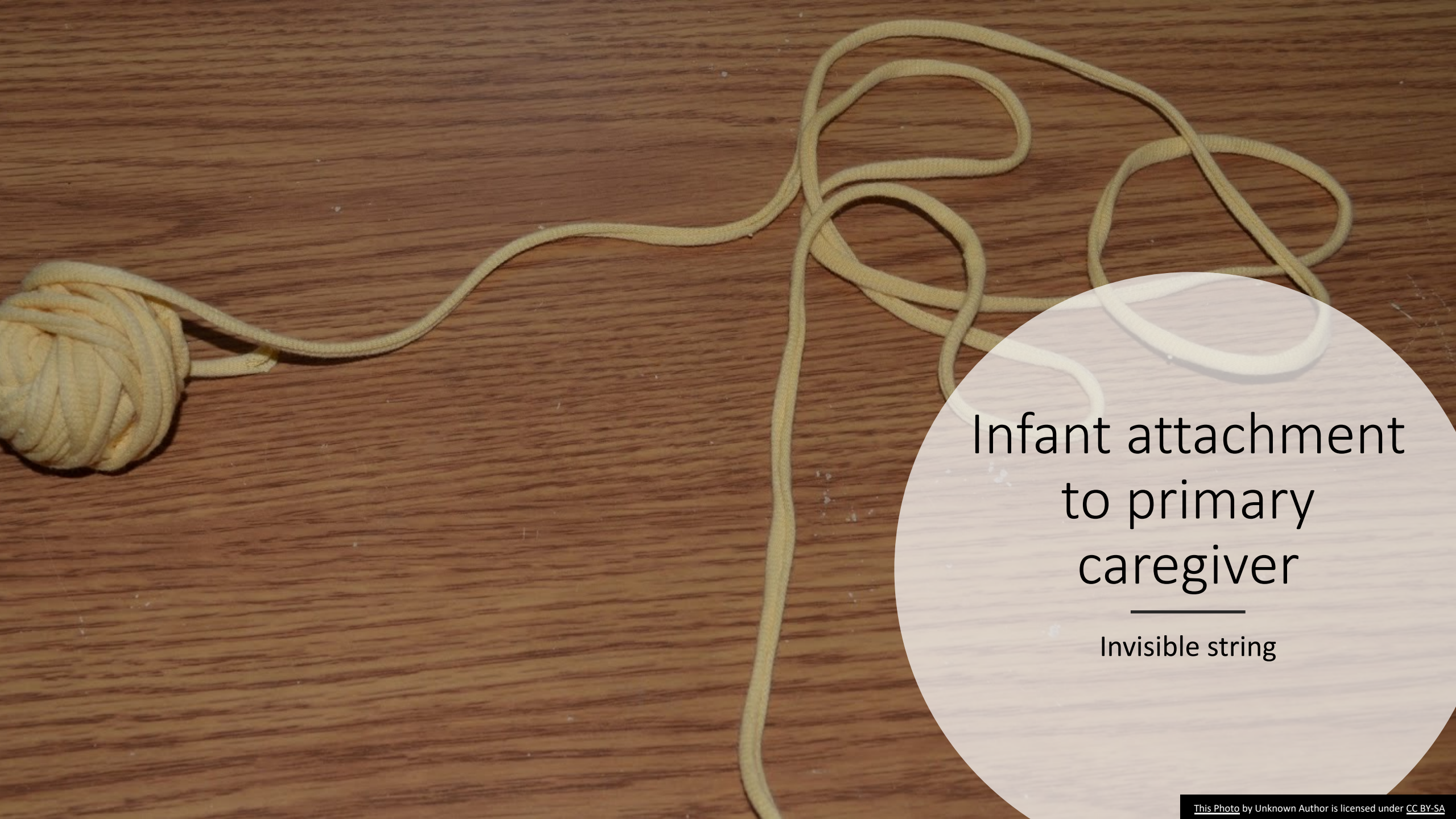
Ainsworth's "Strange Situation"

- In her 1970s research, [psychologist Mary Ainsworth](#) expanded greatly upon Bowlby's original work. Her [groundbreaking "Strange Situation" study](#) revealed the profound effects of attachment on behavior. In the study, researchers observed children between the ages of 12 and 18 months as they responded to a situation in which they were briefly left alone and then reunited with their mothers.⁴
- Based on the responses the researchers observed, Ainsworth described three major styles of attachment: secure attachment, [ambivalent-insecure attachment](#), and avoidant-insecure attachment. Later, researchers Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth attachment style called disorganized-insecure attachment based on their own research.⁵
- A number of studies since that time have supported Ainsworth's attachment styles and have indicated that attachment styles also have an impact on behaviors later in life.

Attachment

- Secure
- Insecure
- Indiscriminate





Infant attachment
to primary
caregiver

Invisible string

Positive Relationships between adults in baby's life create less stress, less trauma and a smoother transition.

- If both sets of parents can connect the positive impact on baby/child is immense
- Co-reg (baby is attached to primary caregiver, if they are connected with parents, baby will feel comfortable too).

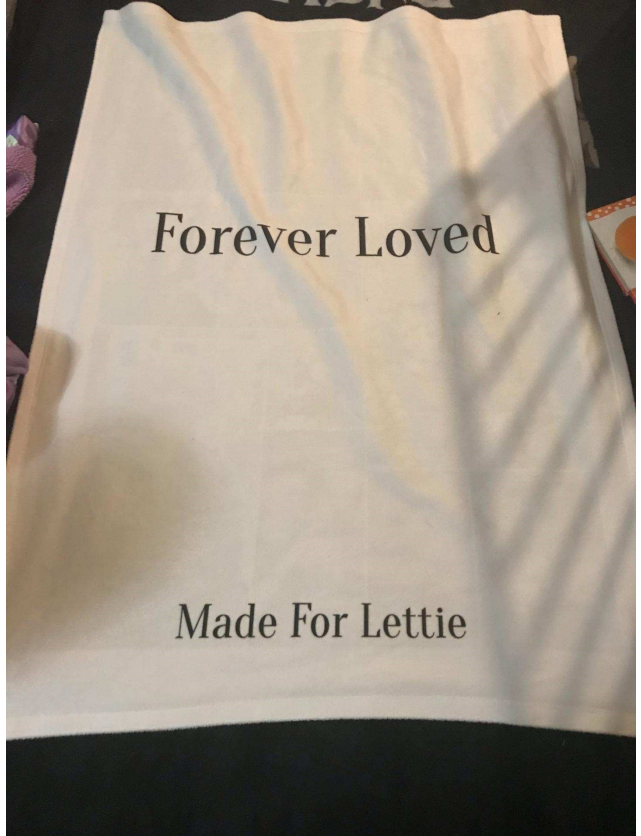
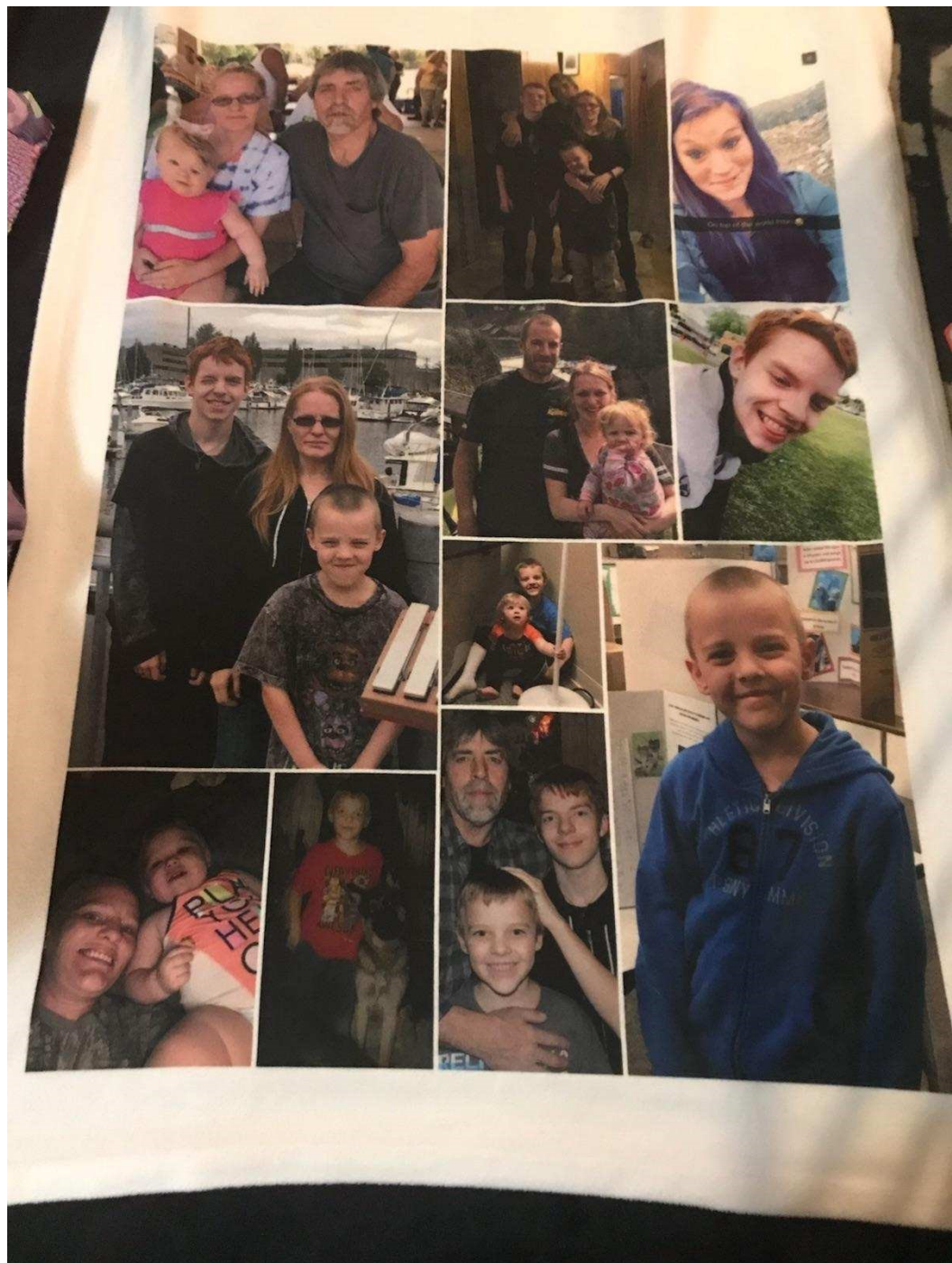




Transition tools

January						
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31





Sending blanket
made by relative
caregiver *used with permission

My house with my foster family



My house with Mommy



Transition Book used with foster parent as toddler transitioned to parent *used with permission

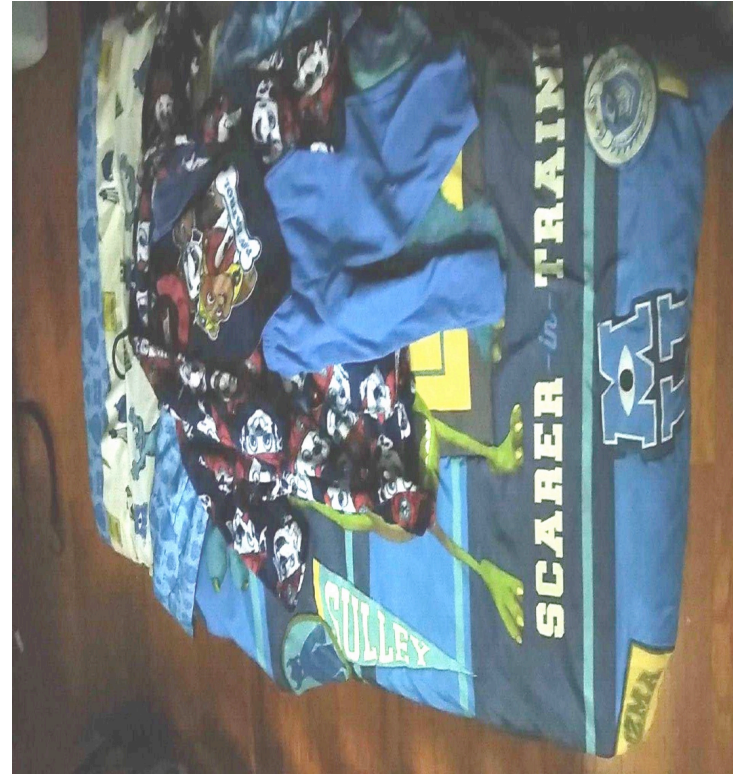
Where I will sleep







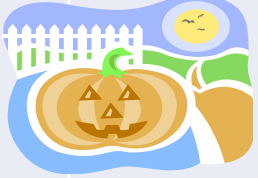
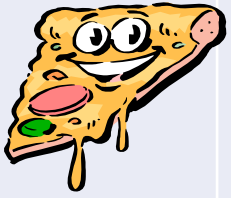
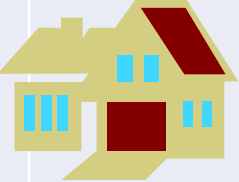





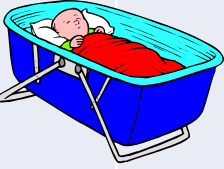


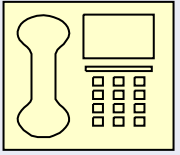

My bed at my foster home



My bed at Mommy's



Transition Calendar

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		10/27/2004 	10/28/2004 	10/29/2004 	10/30/2004 
11/1/2004	10/26/2005 11/2/2004 	11/3/2004 	11/4/2004 	11/5/2004 	11/6/2004 
11/8/2004		11/10/2004 	11/11/2004 	11/12/2004 	11/13/2004
11/15/2004	11/9/2004 11/16/2004 				
					

The first 5 years last forever

- Relationships and skills developed in the first 5 years last a lifetime
- How do we support building trust and safety in children in care, helping them calm their nervous systems and prepare for success in life?