

# Relationships with Children

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The relationship between the child welfare worker and the child is just as important as the relationship between the child welfare worker and the child's caregivers. A study conducted by Bell (2002) looked at children's perceptions of the care and services provided by the child welfare system and specifically their assigned worker.

- ✎ Most children interviewed understood that the meetings with their social worker were important but did not understand the process or what the actual purpose of meetings were.
- ✎ There was a lack of clarity about who was involved in meetings and what their roles were.
- ✎ Many children were afraid of the consequences they may be in if they shared certain information. The greatest fear for all children was removal from the home.
- ✎ One third of the children said they had been asked their views, but most felt they did not influence key decisions.
- ✎ The children valued being asked questions.
- ✎ Most recalled their first contact with their social worker as being scary.
- ✎ Most of the children especially valued relationships where emotional support was combined with practical help, such as arranging contact with siblings or providing guidance as to careers.
- ✎ Some children reported that they felt patronized by the social worker or that the social worker was trying to control them. This was unhelpful in relationship building.
- ✎ Children also reported they felt the questioning of the social worker was invasive and threatening.

In conclusion, when working with children social workers need to be considerate of that child's understanding, capability to contribute, fears, and needs. For the most part, the children studied wanted to understand what was happening to them and their families, and wanted to actively participate in the intervention. Just as social workers must build a healthy relationship with caregivers, they must also build a healthy relationship with the children they serve.

