

PERCEPTION OF FAMILY FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

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Introduction

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- We are going to present a part of the results from the research on the question of “The links in foster family in France”
- A qualitative research with more than one hundred children and families.
- Team: sociologists and lawyers of the university of Aix-Marseille and Toulouse.
- “What is a family for the children in foster care”?
- The research provide a new perspective, of the coexistence at various levels of links between foster children and foster family and parents, discover new possibilities filial connections and attachments.



The foster parenthood

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In France the foster family is a family, “assistant family” which is given the responsibility to exercise an important part of the parental functions and allow the child to establish new family links, and to hold a professional position in the child protection services.

What does it mean to be parent? Is it enough to be indicated as such by the right?

Being a parent is established legally or biologically, but is it enough to become a parent?

Methodology

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The research concerns two departmental councils in France: Bouches du Rhône and Vaucluse

71 Foster
children

25 Foster
family

10 Parents

15 Sisters
and brothers

15 children
of foster
family

We analysed the file of foster children

Who are the foster children?

A diversity of situations

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The sample covered an age range from 5 to 25 years old

Average age = 15 years

Some of children having been few months old when they were fostered, while others were adolescents.

The average duration of the foster care is
9,5 years

(few months for certain teenagers, and all the childhood in foster care for others).

Multiple placements and breakdowns

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In the report to the right of the child (on 2011, 32, 2109), the defender of children rights highlights that the child is brought to live repeatedly separations and breakdowns in connection with people important affectively for him, separations causing traumas.

On average, both girls and boys experience 3 different placements while in care. The longer they stay in foster care, the more they are likely to experience different types of placements.

Way of foster children most of the time multiple

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When the time of foster care exceeds
6 years, the child knew in 50%, 4
placements

For $\frac{3}{4}$ of the children, the foster family is
not the first measure.

What is a family for the child in care?

Results from the interviews

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A family, it is first of all to live together, to share time together, to support each other in difficult times, and to love together.

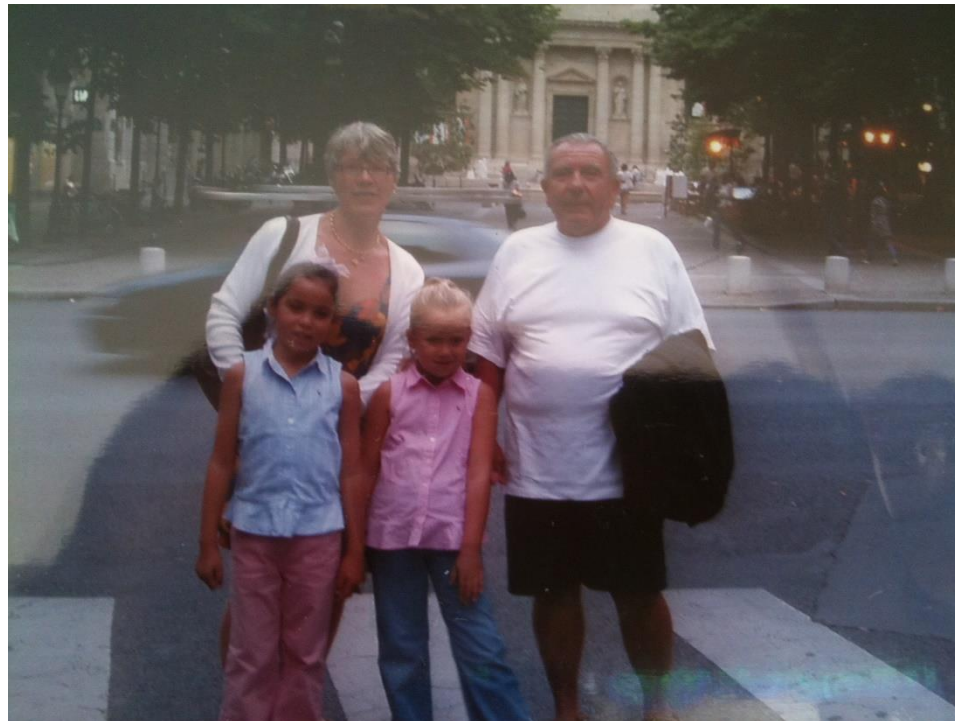
Almost all of the children express strong feelings for their foster family.

We notice an emotional gap between both families, foster family and biological family.

The foster family, the family reference

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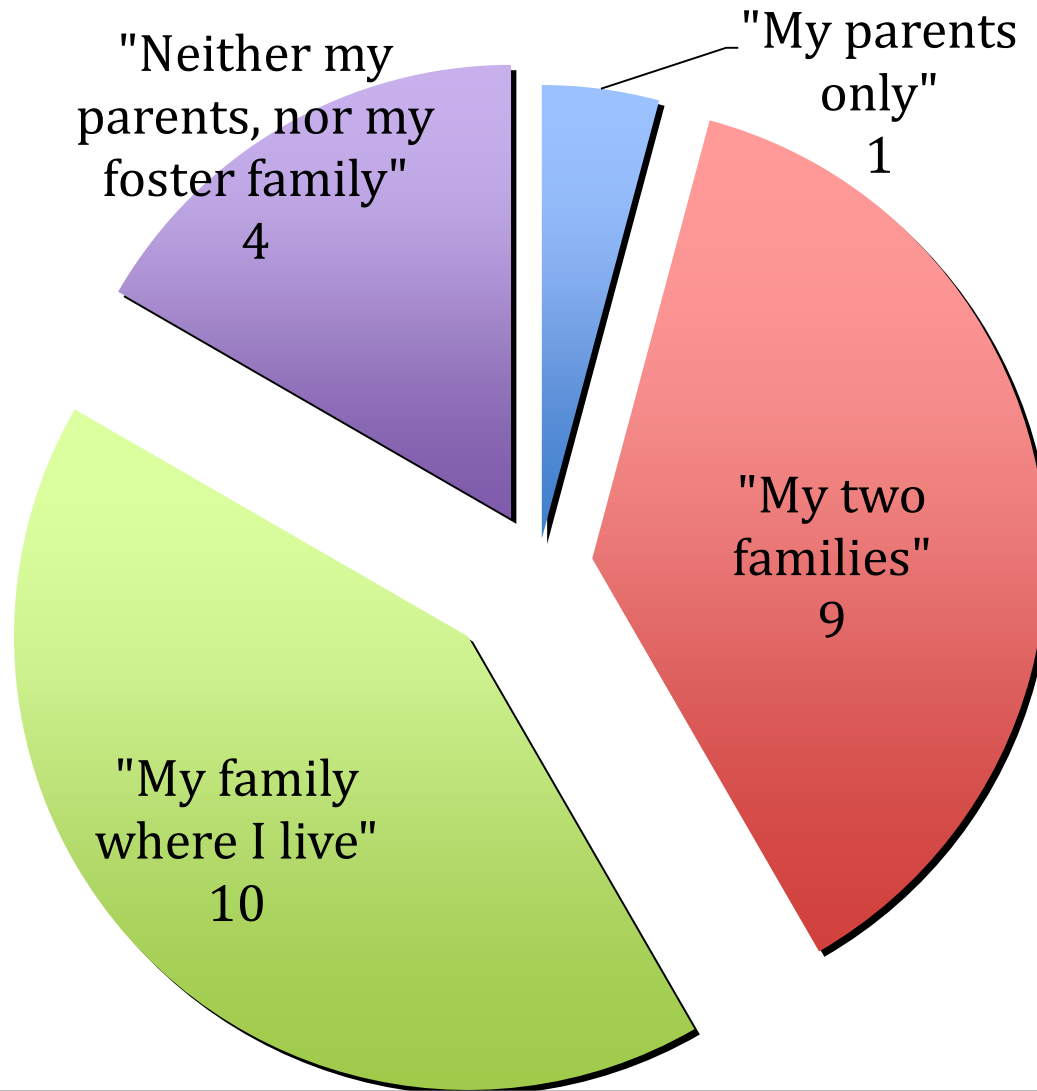
The decrease of the emotional relations with one of the parents, or both parents lead the child slowly to reconstruct itself outside his biological family, and to consider foster family like his own family.



Four family perceptions



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The family positioning of children between the four perceptions is very clear and not confusing.
2/3 of children make a family choice
1/3 consider having two families.

Four family perceptions



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"My family, the one where I live", they consider as secondary their biological family and give to their foster family.

Education received, the care provided, attachment to the foster family (10/24)

- ***"My two families"***, they compare the two families by referring in one case to their birth, and in the other to their daily education (9/24)

- ***"Neither my parents nor my foster family"***, they consider that they do not really have families and do not refer to either one or the other, (4/24)

- ***"My parents only"***, children consider their biological family as their only family (1/24)

1. "My family, the one where I live"

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In the majority of cases, children are placed in the category "My family, the one I live"

Considering as a rebirth the fact of having been placed in their foster family and experiencing the placement event as a chance.

They feel they are making family with their foster family, while occasionally keeping in touch with their parents.

The foster family becomes the family of reference by the exercise of its functions, of take care, education, solidarity and love.

"Nathalia is like a mother, I came in I was 14 months old, she taught me everything, like making shoelaces, it's like a mother, she did the work a mother does."

Foster children and children of foster family together on the picture in the living-room



1. "My family, the one where I live"

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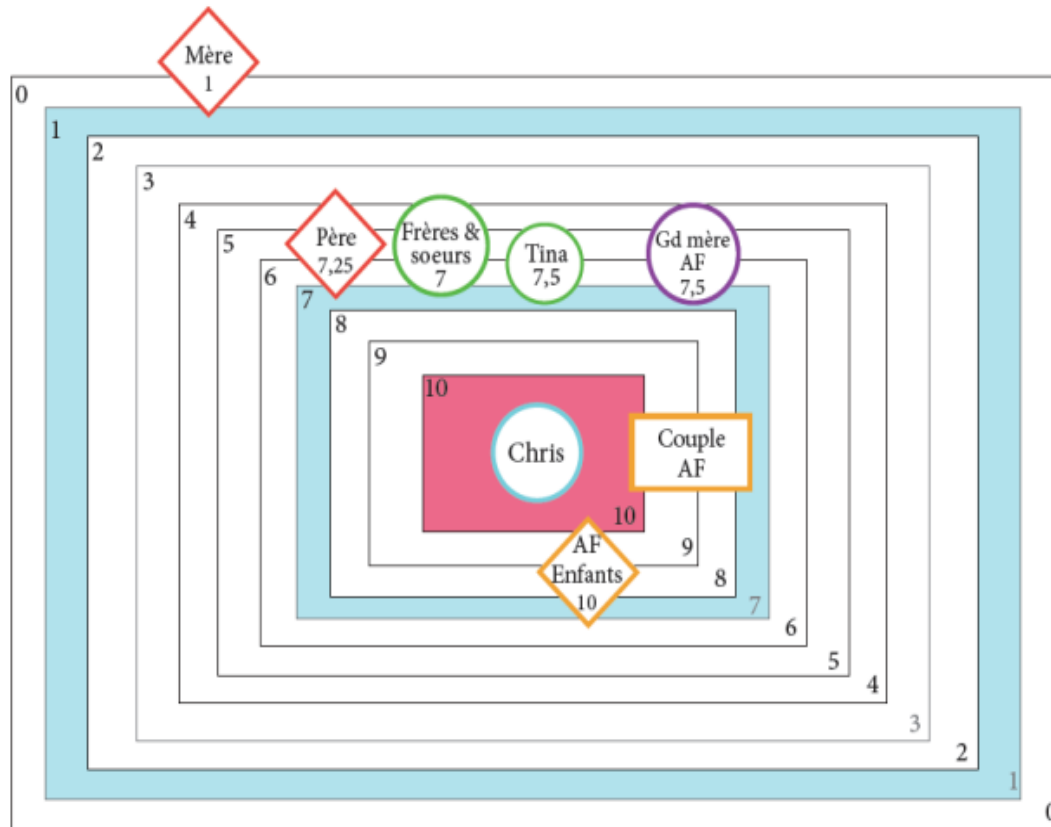


Diagram showing the most important people for the child on a scale from 0 to 10.
10 most important foster family, 1 less important mother

2. "My two families »



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In this position, the child can't make a choice between the two families.

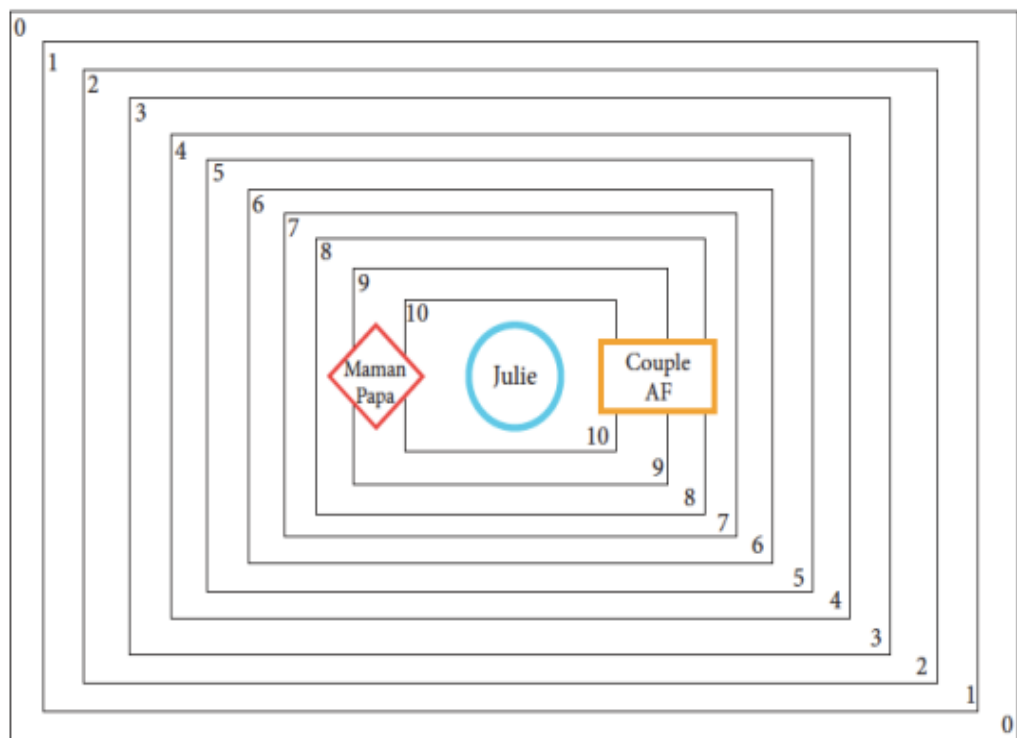
Julie is a 7-year-old child, placed since the age of 4 in her foster family with two half-sisters Adeline (9 years old) and Mathilde (13 years old), her other half-brothers aged 3 years old in the parental home.

"I know what a family is - it's all together! - but I do not know how to answer your question ... because I do not know with which family? Mum or auntie? Because I have two families! Ah-ah-ah mom and auntie! But I feel good here, but I would like that - once a week - sometimes finally - Sunday for example.... I'm going to see my mom and until Sunday I'll see Auntie! Here ! I would like that to happen like this! "

2. "My two families »

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Diagram showing the most important people for the child on a scale from 0 to 10. 10 most important, foster family and parents



2. *"My two families »*

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The child describes here a family perception that we find during marital separation and the establishment equal time each parent, a time with mother, an other time with father.

That which is desired by foster child is also spend equal time with each family, one time with biological family, one time with foster family.

3. *"My parents only »*

Only example of this position, Eric has been placed more than 10 years in the foster family, today in “major young contract” he lives in a room right next to the foster family. Still in school, he spends part of his time with the foster family, especially for meals. He sees his father once a month, and his mother calls him every week. He considers that only his parents are part of his family.

3. "My parents only »

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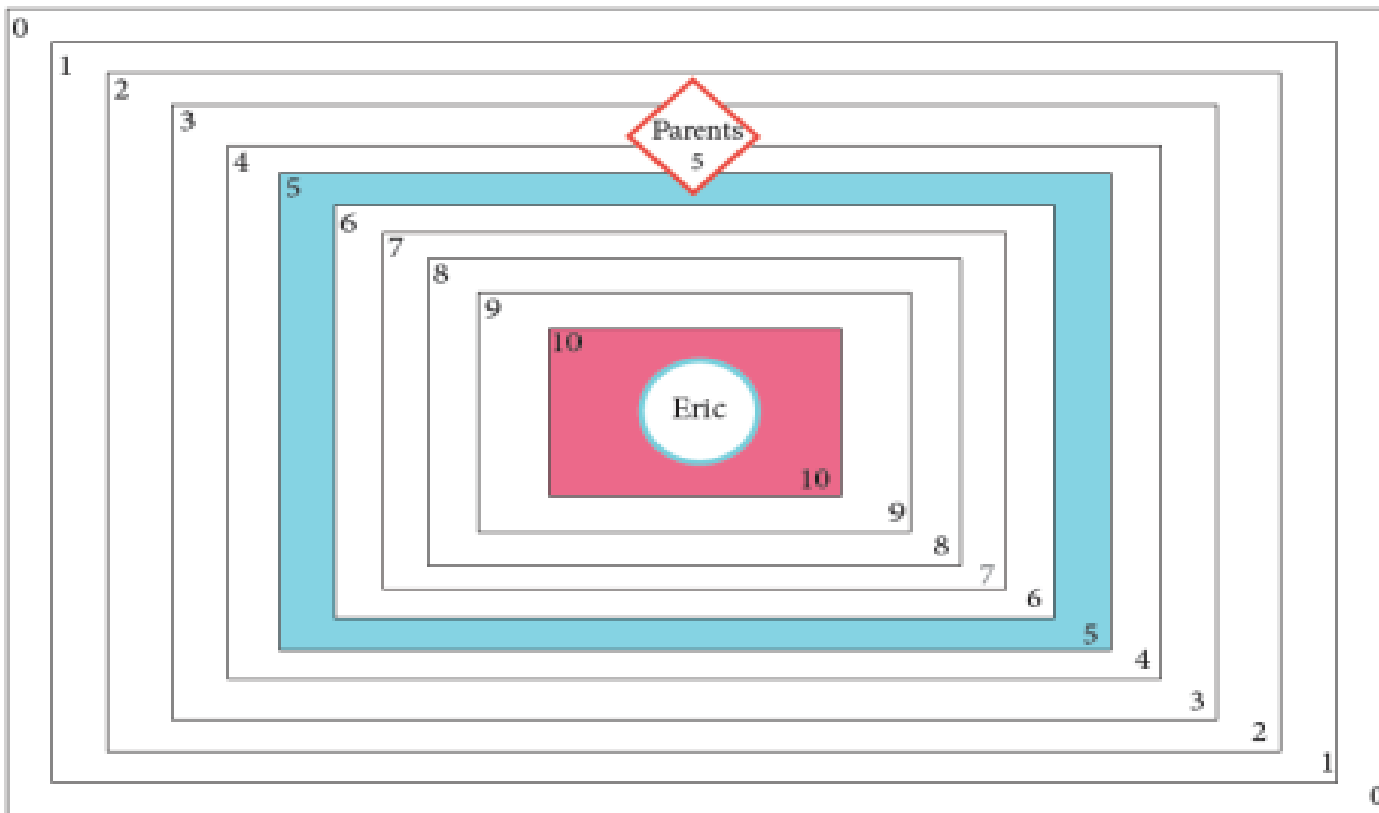


Diagram showing the most important people for the child on a scale from 0 to 10.

The parents have been placed at 5, the foster family does not appear

4. "Neither my parents nor my foster family »

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Some children stand out from the previous positions, finding their families elsewhere, apart from the biological and foster family references.

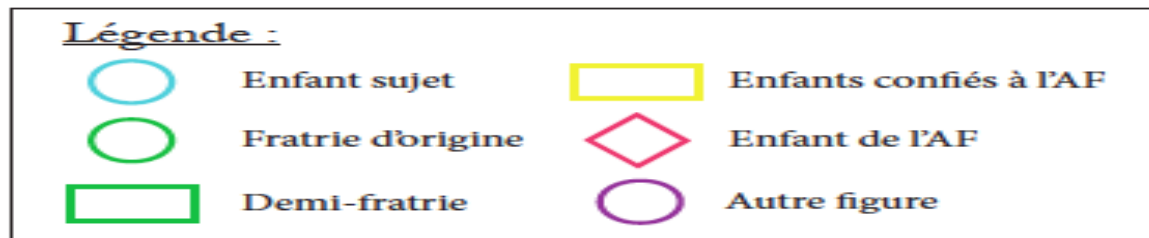
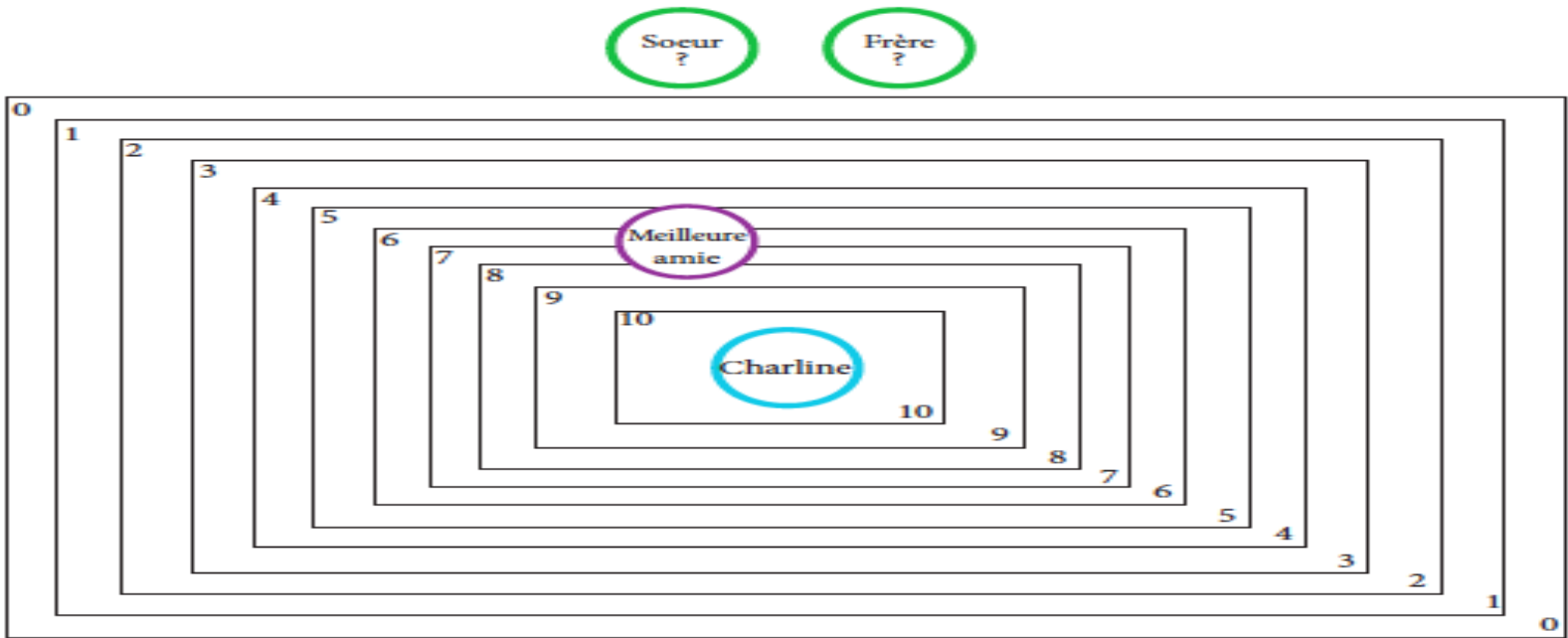
Some young people consider that they can't rely on their biological family or their foster family. These young people are often older, on the sidelines of the child protection service, either because they will leave it soon or because they have come out and look back on their history.

They turn to a third family figure related to a possible alliance, family figure of the future spouse.

"My boyfriend's family is like my family, it's my family at heart, when I go home they look like I'm going home There I feel better than here. "

4. "Neither my parents nor my foster family »

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Neither the parents nor the foster family appear, only a friend is noted

A foster solidarity

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Solidarity and support function

For the children, the family is present for better and for worse, and in hard time we can always count on his family.

We notice that many parents are not mentioned by children when a problem arises, but it is the foster family who exercise this function of solidarity and support, during childhood and the entrance to adulthood.

The children refer to the relationship with the parent, they are referring most often to their difficulties, providing a reason for the lack of parental support. The foster family is therefore most often the one on which the child relies.

"Family is more about how you feel good, and how you can count on!"

Conclusion...

An openness to plural links

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Gradually we are rethinking foster family links in France, recognizing foster parenting (Chapon, 2014, 2018), foster co-parenting between biological family and foster family by putting the child at the heart of this project.

It is important to allow the child to leave the links he experiences during his childhood.

It allows a recognition of the story of the child in its entirety, both taking into account his past and his present to enable him to build his future.

Bibliographie

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Les différents modes de suppléance en famille d'accueil

Quelles relations entre l'enfant confié, ses parents et sa famille d'accueil ?

Nathalie Chapon Aix-Marseille-Université (AMU), Laboratoire méditerranéen de sociologie (Lames), UMR 7305 – Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS).

Les derniers chiffres de l'ONPE (l'Observatoire national de la protection de l'enfance) en 2017 estiment à 295 357 le nombre d'enfants mineurs pris en charge par les services de la protection de l'enfance sur la France entière, soit un taux de 20,1 % des moins de 18 ans. Sur l'ensemble de cette population 52 % vivent en familles d'accueil, 39 % en établissements (maisons d'enfants à caractère social), 4 % d'entre eux sont autonomes et 5 % bénéficient d'un autre mode d'hébergement (Oned, 2015). Ainsi, en France, on peut estimer que plus de soixante-neuf mille enfants sont retirés du domicile parental pour être confiés à une famille d'accueil, le plus souvent par une décision de justice (Drees, 2013). La prise en charge de ces enfants a fait l'objet de plusieurs rapports (Aubin *et al.*, 2012 ; Oned, 2013) et débats dans la société française, notamment sur la question d'une meilleure protection de l'enfance, de la prise en compte de l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant face aux séparations familiales mais aussi d'accueil (Paul et Verrier, 2013), aux multiples ruptures affectives dans les parcours de prise en charge des enfants accueillis (Gouttenoire et Corpart, 2014), à des choix institutionnels parfois davantage orientés vers un maintien des liens d'origine, que vers une réelle réponse aux besoins fondamentaux de l'enfant (ONPE, 2016). Ces débats ne sont pas récents, mais ils ont permis l'émergence d'une nouvelle politique de l'enfance avec la loi du 14 mars 2016 relative à la protection de l'enfant. Cette nouvelle loi a divers objectifs dont ceux de renforcer le suivi, l'accompagnement des enfants, l'amélioration de leurs conditions de prise en charge et la sécurisation de leur parcours. Cependant, les contradictions présentes au sein des institutions en charge de la protection de l'enfance demeurent encore présentes par une conception profamiliale, héritière de l'histoire de la famille et des politiques familiales. Ainsi, l'histoire de la famille est avant tout celle des parents, en passant du parent déchu avant les années 1970 au parent soutenu par une assistance éducative maintenant, dans la mesure du possible, les liens de l'enfant à ses parents. « L'aide sociale

à l'enfance est le résultat d'une très longue histoire, histoire des conceptions de la parentalité et de la filiation, du bien et du mal, du toléré et de l'inacceptable... » (Verdier et Noé, 2013). Les enfants pris en charge par une mesure d'aide sociale sont confrontés aux paradoxes les plus forts, séparer l'enfant de ses parents, le confier à une famille (employée par les services sociaux) qui l'élève, et à laquelle il peut s'attacher, mais sans pouvoir vraiment le dire, en cultivant le désir du retour au domicile parental. Une famille d'accueil soumise à des injonctions paradoxales, d'aimer tout en restant professionnelle.

Face à un contexte de protection de l'enfance aux intérêts très contradictoires, mieux connaître le quotidien des enfants confiés, les relations familiales et affectives au sein des familles d'accueil, mieux identifier les relations avec la famille d'origine, les frères et les sœurs, puis tout ce qui fait famille autour de l'enfant a été une nécessité posée par l'Observatoire national de la protection de l'enfance (ONPE). Dans le cadre de cet article, une partie des résultats de la dernière étude seront présentés sur la question des liens en famille d'accueil (Chapon et Siffren-Blanc, 2017). Ainsi, en accueil familial, l'enfant vit dans une famille qui a délégué au quotidien pour exercer une partie importante des fonctions de soin et d'éducation, exercée habituellement par ses parents. Vivre ensemble dans un quotidien presque ordinaire suscite l'émergence de liens affectifs inédits, l'expression d'une parentalité singulière du côté de la famille d'origine mais aussi de la famille d'accueil, de modes de placement différenciés en fonction de l'enfant, de son histoire et de la famille d'accueil. Vivre en famille d'accueil, pour l'enfant, est une expérience hors du commun. En effet, il s'agit de « faire famille » dans une nouvelle famille baignée dans un cadre institutionnel, avec une équipe de travailleurs sociaux, des parents plus ou moins présents, des mesures législatives qui déterminent le parcours de prise en charge, dont le maintien ou non de l'enfant dans sa famille d'accueil, et l'éventuel retour au domicile

Mots-clés
• Enfant
• Accueil familial
• Relations affectives
• Suppléance



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Les liens affectifs en familles d'accueil

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