

## **Box 5.2    Family Preservation Versus Out-of-Home Care**

One of the most controversial issues within child protection circles is the question of when children should be temporarily or permanently removed from their homes. CPS agencies are mandated to make child protection their top priority, and no one questions this mandate. But when a child is at risk, what course of action will serve the best interests of the child? Should CPS attempt to maintain the family unit, offering support and training in hopes that abuse will not occur again in the future? Or should CPS remove the child from the home and place him or her in a temporary setting with the hope of eventually returning the child to the home? Or should the state seek a more permanent solution for the child, such as adoption or placement in an orphanage?

A brief review of federal policy on family preservation helps put the current controversy in context. Federal child welfare policy has, since the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272), embraced the goal of family preservation as its guiding principle. The 1980 act, sometimes referred to as the Reunification Act, requires that states, as a condition of receiving federal child welfare funding, make every reasonable effort to rehabilitate abusive parents and keep families together. If one were going to select key concepts that