

fostering perspectives

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Overcoming parenting challenges

Though vastly rewarding, raising kids also brings with it long hours, thankless tasks, anxiety, and frustration. No one can deny it: parenting comes with challenges.

This can be doubly true when you're raising a child who is or has been in foster care. Because many of these young people have experienced trauma and difficult life circumstances, the approaches that worked with your biological kids may be ineffective or even counterproductive with children in care.

As a result, resource parents face tests—sometimes daily, or even hourly. Tests of their patience, compassion, flexibility, and resourcefulness.

Thank goodness foster and adoptive parents don't shy away from a challenge!

Nor will they pass up a chance to learn something helpful or put another tool in their parenting tool box. In recognition of this fact, this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* explores ideas and strategies that can make it easier to understand and effectively manage challenging behaviors in children who have experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other traumas.

We hope the information and perspectives shared here will support you so that you can continue to give your priceless gift to children and their families.

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by Kirk Martin

Handling meltdowns in public

You know what it's like. You've been penned up inside all week and would just like to enjoy a simple, peaceful meal out together as a family.

Okay, maybe not peaceful, but without incident.

Just as the waiter brings your food and you pick up your fork, one of the kiddos starts melting down.

Your anxiety and blood pressure skyrocket. He's getting louder.

You try the sweet "Shhhhh, it's okay, honey," but you know that hasn't worked the last 497 times you tried it.

Other parents are starting to glance over. You get that sick feeling in your stomach, which turns to anger. Your tone is short now—"Stop it. Now."

Your son is getting more upset. People are turning around in their chairs. You know what they are thinking: "Can't you even control your kids for a simple meal?"

Embarrassed, you yank your child's arm and pull him to the bathroom.

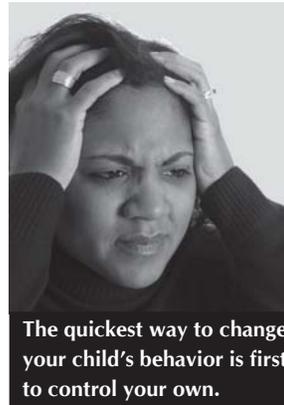
Now he's crying and you feel awful.

So how can we change this situation? Realize that there are three incontrovertible facts of life that you cannot control. The secret is learning to control what you can.

1. You will be judged

Get used to it. Some people will think you are a terrible parent. That you're too soft. Or too harsh. They'll wonder "Why do you appear in public if you can't control your child?" You can feel the glares and hear the lectures in your head. These things are beyond your control. What CAN you control?

Control your embarrassment. This is YOUR issue, not the child's. If you allow another person's opinion to cause you to snap at your kids, you are giving a stranger power over your emotions. That stranger now has power over your relationships because you are doing what HE thinks should be done—which is the expedient, convenient approach.



The quickest way to change your child's behavior is first to control your own.

Do not give anyone that power. You don't owe anyone an answer. In the end, your relationship with your child is most important. And when your child sees that you can remain calm and emotionally available to them, even when others are giving dismissive glances, they will feel safe and secure.

2. Other people will say stupid things

Count on it. You'll get stares from people wondering why you have three multi-ethnic kids

about the same age. In the presence of your kids, people will ask:

- "So where is your mother?"
- "Where did you get them?" (As if there's a Kids R Us to pick out children!)
- "What's wrong with their REAL parents? Drugs? Oh, that's a shame."
- "They are so lucky you took them."

You can't control other people's ignorance, but you can control your response.

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Make it personal. Brag about your kids' gifts and passions. "This is Tarik and he can play the piano and guitar beautifully. Jadya has the biggest heart in the world and I wouldn't be surprised if she helps millions of kids with disabilities one day. And this is Carlos, the best Lego builder in America and a future architect. I guess you can tell I'm really proud of my kids and blessed to have them in my life."

This should produce some shame in the people asking the questions—good! By controlling how YOU talk about YOUR kids, you change how other people view them. And boy does it feel good for kids to hear Mom and Dad brag about their specific gifts.

3. Your kids will have meltdowns in public

It's a given. You can be the greatest parent ever and it will happen. So the big question becomes: WHEN this happens, how are YOU going to react?

Control yourself, not your kids. Look inward and control your own anxiety. Get to a calm place first. Otherwise, you will just yank the child's arm, speak in a terse tone, and

threaten. The situation will get worse as your child jerks his arm away.

Your job isn't to control your child's behavior. It's first to control your own and then teach your children to control their own.

The quickest way to change your child's behavior is to first control your own. Speak in a firm, matter-of-fact manner, like you've been through this before and it's no big deal.

Calmly redirect your child—if you can, give him a specific job to focus on. ("Could you please get us twelve napkins and seven packets of ketchup? That would help me a lot.") Getting kids moving is a great way to extinguish the emotional fire.

When you stay immovable, it gives your kids confidence. Inside they know, "I can count on my Mom when I'm at my worst."

Is it easy? Absolutely not. So practice it ahead of time. The next time your child gets upset, what specific action can you take? How are you going to calm yourself in that moment? Picture it and practice it. It gets easier!

I'd like to wrap this up with a special note from my teenage son. I think it's good to hear the perspective of a child in this situation (see box, top right).



Casey Martin

A Kid's Perspective

"When I'm upset and freaking out, it's usually because I'm feeling out of control of the situation. I don't need my parents freaking out. That just makes me more upset because now no one is in control of themselves, and it's just a big scream-fest or threat-fest. When they are yelling or just glaring down at me, it's not safe to even apologize. What I really need when I'm upset is for my parents to model calm and lead me into a calmer place."

On behalf of our family, we want to personally thank you for your selfless commitment to helping children. You are lifesavers. If we can help in any way, write and let us know you are a foster parent.

Celebrate Calm Founder Kirk Martin and his son, Casey (17), have trained over 150,000 parents, teachers and kids how to control their emotions through their newsletter, radio show and workshops. Sign up for their newsletter, say hi and learn more about their family-friendly programs at www.CelebrateCalm.com.

NC Foster Care Alumni Share Advice about Social Media

You hear the term "social media" everywhere these days. From the White House to Waffle House, everyone seems to have a Facebook account, sends tweets on Twitter, and is able to video-chat with anyone on the planet via Skype. As concepts go, "social media" is broad, referring as it does to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Facebook, Twitter, Skype, MySpace, Tagged, and Bebo are all examples of social media, because they are ways to connect socially via computer or mobile phone.

Noting the growing use of social media by youth in foster care, the NC Division of Social Services recently asked foster care alumni participating in its summer student intern program to create youth-friendly guidelines for how to stay safe and responsible on the Internet. Here is the advice about using social media that these foster care alumni have for youth still in care:

Be Safe. In general, social media is safe. There are rules and regulations for each site. But it is important to use the privacy settings to protect your personal information. Make a report to the site administrator if there is foul activity on your page.

Be Kind. Never use social media to abuse or harass others. You should never:

- Post demeaning, rude, or disrespectful comments or pictures of someone.
- Tease people.
- Talk negatively about someone, even indirectly.
- Stalk people (i.e., no unwanted, obsessive attention or contact).
- Hack someone's page (i.e., gain access to a person's account or page without their permission).
- Reveal someone's personal life online.

Do

- Always set your privacy settings.
- Network with people.
- Be a role model.
- Promote an organization or business.
- Watch what you post or upload.
- Be respectful of people and their opinions.
- Report people who do things they aren't supposed to.
- Keep your information private.

Don't

- Add people you don't know to your social networks.
- Post provocative or derogatory pictures of yourself or anyone else.
- Harass others.
- Curse or use foul language.
- Hack into other people's pages.
- Tag people in pictures or comments who don't want to be tagged.
- Physically meet people you meet online.
- Put all your personal business online.

Employers now look at potential employees' social media pages. This includes looking at comments and links posted on your page, interests and likes, pictures, and even links or comments made by your friends.

Finally, consider this: when you post or upload something on the web it is there forever. NOTHING can be erased! To protect yourself, do not post or upload comments or pictures that are inappropriate. What you post in social media can affect your future in either a positive or negative way.

When you are using social media, someone is always watching!

To learn more about social media and foster parenting, check out "The 411 on Social Media, Networking and Texting!" by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin at <http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/1058/socialmedia.pdf>.

When your child engages in difficult behavior by David Pitonyak

Several years ago I was asked to speak to a group of parents in Vermont. The title of the presentation was “Supporting Children With Special Needs.” Five minutes into my talk, a parent stood up and interrupted me. She insisted that I stop referring to her daughter as someone with “special needs.” I had been using the term a lot.

“My daughter does not have special needs” she said. “My daughter has the *same* needs as anyone else. She has a need to live at home with her family. She has the need for a good education, friends, fun, and a supportive family. Sometimes you professionals — in your efforts to provide special services to people — forget the ordinary, everyday things that people need.”

As awkward as I felt about the evening, I felt grateful too. I learned one of the most important lessons I have ever learned as a professional: sometimes, in our efforts to provide “special” services to people, we often forget the ordinary things people need every day—friends, family, interesting and fun things to do, safety and security, and a chance to make a contribution to the larger community. In short, a chance to belong.

What follows are ten things to remember if your child, because he or she exhibits difficult behaviors, is at risk of *not belonging*. If you don't have the time or energy to read one more word, remember these two ideas:

Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do. If you don't, it will be very difficult to take care of anyone else.

Remember that your child's problem behaviors have meaning. Finding out what your child needs is the first step in supporting your child, and the people who love your child, to change.

1. Be mom and dad first. Your love is the most powerful treatment any of us can imagine. If all the other stuff you have to do first interferes with being a parent, stop. Someone else can do some of the other necessary stuff, but nobody else can be Mom and Dad.

2. Think of challenging behaviors as “messages.” Difficult behaviors result from unmet needs. Through his or her behavior your child might be trying to say *I'm lonely, I'm bored, I have no power, I don't feel safe, You don't value me, I don't know how to tell you what I need, or even My ears hurt.*

A single behavior can “mean” many things. The important point is that difficult behaviors do not occur by accident, or because someone has a disability. Difficult behaviors are expressions of real and legitimate needs. All behavior, even if it is self-destructive, is “meaning-full.”

3. Learn about person-centered planning.

Unlike traditional approaches to planning, which ask questions like, “What's wrong with you?” and “How can we *fix* you?”, person-centered planning focuses on questions like, “What are your capacities and gifts and what supports do you need to express them?” and “What works well for you and what does not?” and “What are your visions and dreams of a brighter future and who will help you move toward that future?”

4. Don't assume anything. Don't underestimate your child's potential because of his labels or because he has failed to acquire certain skills. You can speak volumes to your child about his self-worth by always including your child in conversations and explaining things as clearly as you can. Even if you doubt your child's ability to understand your words, know that at the very least your child will understand the tone of your voice; make sure it reflects dignity and respect as often as you can. Never speak about your child as if he was not in the room.

5. Remember that relationships can make all the difference. Loneliness may be the most significant disability your child will ever face. Many people with disabilities, young and old, live lives of extraordinary isolation. Friends are often absent altogether. Encourage, guide, and support your child to make friends, be a friend, and become a part of the community.

6. Help your child to have more fun. Fun is a powerful antidote to problem behaviors. Count the things your child enjoys, the places she likes to go. Compare this to the number of things other children enjoy, the number of places other children go. Ask yourself, “Is my child having fun? Is she experiencing enough joy? Is this an interesting life?” Help your child add to her list of interesting (and really fun) things to do. Spend time in regular community places where people hang out. Make having fun a goal.

7. Take care of yourself, take care of your partner, and join with other parents to support each other. Before you became a parent—or a foster parent—many of you were a partner in a relationship that had enough love, nurturing, and respect to want children in your home. Don't lose sight of that relationship. Before you were in that relationship, you were a person that someone found attractive, vital, and loving. Don't lose sight of that person. Get connected with parents of children with and without disabilities. Speak up whenever your child's future is at stake.

8. Help your child make a contribution to others. We all need to be needed. Help your child find a way to make a contribution to

Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do.

If you don't, it will be very difficult to take care of anyone else.



others. Help your child learn to support friends (e.g., an invitation to a sleep over, learning to ask “How are you doing?” or “What's new?”). Things as simple as helping with household chores or helping out at church can teach your child that she *can* make a contribution.

9. Instead of ultimatums, give choices. If your child's behavior challenges you, help him or her find more desirable ways to express the needs underlying his or her behaviors. Instead of ultimatums, give choices.

Don't assume that helping your child to have more choices means letting him do whatever he wishes. Limit-setting is an important and fair part of any relationship. The real question is who is setting the limits and why. If limits are imposed upon children without their input, and if the limits are part and parcel of a life in which your child is powerless, even your best advice may be interpreted as one more statement of “do it my way or else.” Expect a general disregard for advice when the person receiving the advice is never heard.

10. Establish a working relationship with a good primary health care professional. When we are sick, we are not ourselves. Many people who exhibit difficult behaviors do so because they don't feel well. The sudden appearance of behavior problems may be a signal that your child does not feel well. Illnesses as common as a cold or earache can result in behaviors as inconsequential as grumpiness or as serious as head banging. It is important to establish a working relationship with a good primary health care physician.

Don't be afraid of telling your child's doctor that you don't understand a recommendation or finding. It is important to get a clear and straightforward answer to all of your questions. Remember too that it is important to go beyond a concept of health as the absence of a disease or illness. “Feeling well” and “being healthy” involves everything from a balanced diet to a good night's sleep. Help your child to learn about “wellness.”

Adapted from the essay entitled “Notes for Parents.” To read the complete essay, visit <http://www.dimage.com/Parents.pdf>. David Pitonyak, Ph.D., can be reached through the website www.dimage.com.

Shared parenting can reduce disruptive behaviors

During my early years as a foster parent, the child welfare system believed children needed time without contact with their parents so they could adjust to the foster family. Most contact occurred only during supervised visits at the agency. Foster parents had little or no contact with birth families: their job was to take care of the children.

I regret the way we used to do things. I feel that when we fail to keep children close to their birth parents, we add to the trauma that led to foster care in the first place.

We cannot redo what's in the past. But we can learn from our mistakes and do better in the future. Today North Carolina and other states require and strongly support **shared parenting**, which involves foster parents and birth parents coming together to parent children in foster care. Because shared parenting is good for children, it can also help us address and reduce their difficult behaviors. Following are some common situations where shared parenting can help.

Placement

When children enter your home, everyone and everything is strange to them. They are wondering what they did wrong to make them leave their parents. They are afraid and confused. In this situation, possible child behaviors can include crying, screaming, shaking, running away, cursing, defiance, silence, bed-wetting, and fear (e.g., of the dark, the bathroom, people in the home). Here's what foster parents can do in this situation:

Call. Before the social worker leaves your home, get the birth parent's phone number and permission to make phone contact. If permission is denied for the child to talk to the birth parent, get permission to talk to the parents yourself.

Have empathy. When they enter your home, children don't need to see smiles and hear they are going to the zoo tomorrow. They need to hear you say that all of their feelings are okay here. You might say, "It must be scary being here. What can we do to make you less scared? You can ask us anything." Then, listen. Most children will ask about their parents and when they will go home.

Make it clear you care about the child's parents. Tell the child you will try and call his parents. "Your mom is upset too because she didn't want you to leave her. You are here with us while other people are helping your mom so she can take care of you again. I am going to let her know that you miss her. I bet your mama knows what you need at bedtime to help you sleep and she knows your favorite food. You want me to ask her? Tell me

about your mom. What does she do to make you laugh?"

Get permission for the child to talk to the birth parent. Hearing a parent's voice will calm the child. True, the child may cry during or after the call, but the more he feels he can talk to his parent, the less upset he will be. In time, he won't need to make as many calls because he knows he can contact her. The more he hears his birth and foster parents having calm discussions concerning him, the sooner he will feel secure and safe.

Offer comfort items. These can include a nightlight, sleeping bags, their own toiletries, a tour of the house. Prepare an album about your family, with photos listing names and descriptions of rooms, people, and other helpful information for the child to review.

School and Elsewhere

At school, in the home, or elsewhere the child may be resistant, acting out, disoriented, defiant, withdrawn, fearful, etc. Although these behaviors can have many different causes, doing the following may help.

Hold a shared parenting meeting. At this meeting the social worker brings the foster and birth parents face-to-face. It will be easier if they have talked by phone first. The foster parent should ask the birth parent, "What questions do you have for me?" This will let the birth parent know you aren't there just to gain information, you are willing to give it, too. If the questions are too personal, look at the social worker. The social worker should say he is not comfortable giving out that information at this time. If the questions are not about the child, focus needs to be re-established.

Involve birth parents. Keep them informed about the child's positive and negative behaviors. Ask them for advice. Make a decision with them about what to do. If the child knows the birth and foster parents are united, he will not try to manipulate them into taking his side.

Mentor the birth parents. Do all you can to help the birth parents be stronger and healthier parents for their child. Ask them to come to meetings about the child. For instance, at school ask the teacher or counselor to talk to the child's parents. Be there to support and record the discussion. If you care about the child, you should care about his parents' ability to learn parenting skills.

What I Have Learned

When foster parents and birth parents participate in shared parenting, the child wins! This relationship can continue when the child goes home. I was surprised that I became friends with my children's birth parents. I was welcomed in their homes after their families were reunited.

When I showed them respect for being their child's parents and looked for shared parenting opportunities, the fight in them moved into doing what was required to get their family back together. I was not the enemy, but the advocate.

The negative behaviors of the **parents** and the **children** changed.



Donna Foster

Visits

Visits can be very emotional for children. Before and after visits you may find that children are defiant, crying, withdrawn, confused about which parents to align with, aggressive, disrupted in their eating and sleeping, etc. Here are some things that can help:

Before and during visits:

- Make a "Mama Box" with the child. The child puts in items he wants to share with his parent. When the visit is over, the parent encourages the child to find more things to bring to the next visit. The birth parent can bring to the visit a "Visit Box" with items from home. (*Thanks to Judy Calloway for this idea!*)
- Take photos of the birth family with the child. Make a copy for the birth parent. The child's copies can be placed in his life book and a copy framed for his room.
- With the birth parent, use a calendar to show the child when the next visit will be. The child can put a sticker on the calendar each day until the visit day.
- If the birth parent sends clothes, dress the child for the visit in those clothes.

After visits:

- Arrange for the child to talk to his parent by phone.
- The birth parent can share with the foster parent and social worker any of the close relationships the child has so they can be contacted. These people can continue their relationships with the child. Examples: extended family members, teachers, and neighbors.
- Ask the child to share his favorite parts of the visit.
- Be understanding. If the child doesn't want to eat the next meal, have a light snack instead. The child may have eaten snacks at the visit or the child's emotions may make him unable to eat.

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Teaming for safety by Joanne Scaturro

Working with children who have been sexually abused

Schools smell like chalk and pencils at the beginning of the year. Everyone is dressed up, with new notebooks in hand, and new toys to share with peers. My first day as a social worker began with these sights and smells.

A little girl named Brenda was referred to me because she smeared Vaseline all over her arms and legs during class. The teachers were baffled.

When I asked her about it she told me that her daddy did that when he wanted to be close to her in their "secret" way. I asked her to draw a picture of her dad and she drew his face and hands and furiously filled in the lines with a black crayon.

She said, "My daddy hurts my heart." She was five years old.

To this day, I can remember the sadness and compassion I felt as a young social worker. I am glad I remember those feelings because now, 40 years later, when I partner with social workers and foster/adoptive families, we have that common ground of wanting to do whatever we can to provide children who have been sexually abused with a sense of safety.

Here are practical strategies for insuring safety from the course "Fostering and Adopting the Sexually Abused Child" (Children's Alliance of Kansas, 1996):

1. Know your child's history, including details of the abuse.

This information will help you avoid triggers that may bring back the fears associated with being sexually abused. Triggers can include: smells of cologne, tobacco, alcohol or sweat; specific songs or types of music; a certain time of day; being alone with an adult; or horseplay, such as wrestling.

It is okay for you to know your child's history. North Carolina policy permits county DSS agencies to share with foster parents, relatives, or other foster care providers any information they need to care properly for a child placed in their home.

2. Put rules in writing and share them.

Put privacy, safety, and touching rules in writing and share them with the child, agencies that serve your child, and immediate and extended family.

Not only does this make the environment consistent for the child, but gives others information about how to keep the child safe without giving them confidential information. Pay particular attention to privacy rules per-

taining to the bathroom and bedroom, as that is where most sexual abuse takes place.

3. Define physical boundaries.

It's crucial for the team around the child to help redefine appropriate touch. To avoid mixed messages, show the child how to express affection in a nonsexual way. Emphasize that no one has a right to touch a child where a bathing suit covers their body.

4. Validate "emotional radar."

Let the child know that if he or she feels uncomfortable when someone touches them, this feeling is important. Teach them to trust their feelings of discomfort and recognize them as being signals that they should be on guard.

5. Empower the child.

Make it clear to children that they have a right to say no when an older person tries to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

6. List people that can help the child feel safe.

Since children who are sexually abused are at risk to be re-abused, we need to assist them in defining adults with whom they can share information. Let the child have input into this discussion.

7. Play "What if..."

Help the child rehearse resisting possible sexual advances by making up possible situations and asking a child what they would do in that situation. Again, this empowers the child to say no, run away, and tell someone they trust what happened.

8. Know how your agency wants you to handle disclosures of sexual abuse.

Often children do not disclose they have been sexually abused until they are in foster care. Some children wait until they feel secure

Some of the children in foster care have been sexually abused. How can we help these children feel safe?

before sharing details of things that have happened to them.

Most agencies do not want resource families to ask for details; the agency wants to refer the child to someone who will interview them about the situation. Too much questioning by the foster parent can make the court case complicated. Be clear how your agency wants you to handle these difficult conversations.

9. Ensure the school knows who is approved to pick up the child.

It is not enough to give names of individuals who are approved to pick up the child. Work with your agency to provide photographs of those individuals.

10. Don't try to go it alone.

There are common behaviors of sexually abused children that challenge caregivers. Masturbating in public, lack of boundaries, and sexually playing with toys are a few examples. These behaviors can be replaced with more appropriate ones if patiently taught by caring foster or adoptive parents. But this isn't one person's job: it is the treatment team's responsibility to do this together (Foster, 2000).

Perhaps this is the most important message of all: keeping the child safe is a TEAM effort and responsibility. We may not be able to resolve everything our children experience, but we can work together to give them a chance to have a good life.

Joanne Scaturro is a Program Consultant with the NC Division of Social Services Child Welfare Staff Development Team



Stay up-to-date about Internet and phone safety

Most children are teaching us about the Internet, cell phones, and social networking! But the reality is, young people with histories of sexual abuse are at higher risk of online sexual exploitation than are other children (Brown, et al., 2009). Sending personal information or talking online to strangers about sex puts children at the greatest risk, since these actions make them most likely to receive solicitations (Grayson, 2010). Here are some websites to help you keep kids safe.

- a) **Federal Bureau of Investigation: A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety** (www.fbi.gov). Scroll down to "What Are Signs Your Child Might Be At Risk Online?" for ways to recognize possible child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, on the Internet and what to do to prevent and resolve it.
- b) **Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers** (www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/392/internetsafety.pdf). This tip sheet from Adoption Resources of Wisconsin provides clear and helpful information for keeping children safe online.
- c) **NetSmartz** (www.netsmartz.org). Provides resources for parents and guardians, educators, law enforcement, teens and kids. There is also a Spanish online resource.

Building trust, brick by brick by Manny S.

By the time I got sent to my third foster home when I was 8 years old, I'd started to believe that all my experiences in foster care would be negative. I was trapped in a circle of revolving doors, and I didn't think I'd ever be able to stay in one place.

At my first foster home, there was a kid named Robert who thought he could bully my younger brother Daniel.

One day I got so fed up with him that I punched him in the face, and my brother and I got kicked out. Then we were sent to live with my uncle, which was great, until he kicked us out. He said it was because Daniel and I were always fighting.

After getting the boot from my own family, I started to think I couldn't rely on them as much. I figured I could only be independent. I also believed that since I wasn't in those two homes for very long, my next home would be the same.

On my way to my next foster home I thought I'd better be ready to leave in three or four months, and I was already worried about where I'd get sent next. I was also scared of what my new foster mom would be like. I pictured her as a witch with razor-sharp teeth and claws.

No Point in Unpacking

I walked to the door with Daniel and my social worker and rang the bell. I heard barking and I was terrified at what she might have in that house—perhaps a pit bull trained to scare little kids, or torture them as they slept.

The door opened and I saw a woman with a happy face, anxious but full of excitement. She welcomed us in, but I was cautious due to what I'd heard at the door. Then I looked down and saw a little dog whose bark was way bigger than his bite.

I looked around the apartment and I liked what I saw, but I was still on my toes.

The woman said her name was Melba. She showed us our room and told us to make ourselves at home, but I didn't unpack my things just yet. I felt like there was no point since we would be leaving soon anyway. My brother and I stood in the hall as Melba and my social worker talked in the living room. I started to imagine the horrible things she would do or make us do when my social worker left.

When my social worker came in to say goodbye I thought, "Yup, this is it." I heard the door slam shut and my heart started to pound as I heard footsteps closing in toward the room, but I played it cool and sat on the bed. Her mouth opened and just when I thought she was going to breathe fire, she asked, "Are you guys hungry?"

Giving Me Space

Daniel said yes, but I said no. I was, but I wasn't comfortable asking her for anything. When she went to use the bathroom, I ran to the kitchen and grabbed a little something to eat.

Trapped in a circle of revolving doors, I didn't think I'd ever be able to stay in one place.

The first few months were all the same. I would get home from school, go to my room, close the door and do my homework. When Melba would ask if I was hungry I'd usually say no. She didn't annoy me or force me to eat. She gave me my space, which was what I wanted. At dinnertime, I would just stay in my room.

Most of the time when I was in my bedroom, Melba would come in and ask if I'd finished doing my homework. I have to admit, it felt good to know she cared. We'd sometimes have little awkward encounters. Maybe a "Hey" or "Hi," but nothing more than that.

After five or six months, I started thinking I might be here longer than I'd thought. I also noticed Melba's consistency when it came to feeding me and checking my homework. Sometimes I'd take some change off her dresser to see how she'd react, but she never seemed frustrated.

Feeling Warmer Inside

I started to feel a little warmer inside. I began to answer, "Yes," when she asked if I was hungry, and I started leaving the door to my bedroom open. We even started to have conversations about things we liked or had in common. I found out that she'd had other foster children living there, but they were given back to their families. I thought that maybe the same thing would happen to me.

I felt happy that under Melba's care those kids had "survived" long enough to be returned to their families. I felt she could do the same for me until I was reunited with my family. This let me feel comfortable trusting Melba. Pretty soon I started to hug her when I came home from school, and I started showing her more affection than any of my previous foster moms.

On my 9th birthday, Melba took Daniel and me to the World Trade Center, which I'd never visited (this was before 9/11 happened). When we got to a huge building that towered over me, she said, "We're here." I thought that we were going to do something boring, but I was shocked when we got inside. There was actually a huge variety of stores and restaurants. I'd never seen anything like it in my entire life.

Part of the Family

We looked everywhere and we got to eat pizza at a cool restaurant, which I wasn't used to. When we sat down I tried to think of the last time I'd eaten at a table like that. I was so happy that she remembered my birthday, took me somewhere and had gotten me a present.

After that, I opened up a lot more. I believed that Melba had paid her dues and earned her stripes as my foster mom. I started talking to Melba a lot, and I often found myself the one starting the conversations. We'd talk about the news, school, TV and anything else worth talking about. The conversations weren't three hours long, but they were progress nonetheless.



I also began to get closer to her family, which was cool. They didn't live with us, but they all treated me as if I was really part of their family.

Around the time I turned 14, I realized adoption was a possibility. We didn't really talk about it, but as time went on I knew that eventually it had to happen.

'I'm Here for You'

One day Melba sat me on the couch and said, "If you want to be adopted, I am here for you." I had grown to love Melba, but the idea that I couldn't live with my parents again seemed weird to me, and made me sad. I had to think about my situation before I could make a decision.

For years, my birth mother had filled my head with the dream that I'd be going home. But it never happened. Every time she made a promise that I could go home and then didn't keep it, I felt knocked down to the ground. That's when my mother would come again and lift up me up, only to knock me down again. But eventually, I got used to her routine.

Making It Permanent

When I finally realized that going back home wasn't going to happen, I knew that adoption was what I wanted. Now we're in the process of making that happen.

Melba has been my parent for so long; the only thing the adoption will change is that my brother and I will legally belong to her. Melba has given me advice and taught me those life lessons that you need to succeed, like saving money, helping people, and taking school seriously.

Melba and I have developed a bond over the past several years. I am happy that I finally got a break from the negativity, and soon it will be permanent. Melba has been my salvation from a dramatic and awful life. We started from one brick and built a skyscraper of trust, understanding, and love.

Reprinted with permission from Two Moms In My Heart: Teens Write About the Adoption Option, Copyright 2010 by Youth Communication/New York Center, Inc. (www.youthcomm.org)

Foster parent perspectives on establishing trust by Mellicent Blythe

As Manny's story (see opposite page) illustrates, children may come into a new placement with a complicated and unspoken set of fears, expectations, and unmet needs. In many cases, they have developed emotional or behavioral coping mechanisms to protect themselves and survive in an insecure or unsafe world.

How can foster parents welcome and integrate children into their family in a way that overcomes the protective barriers children have erected? We talked with two experienced foster parents to get some ideas: Cindy Meyers (Carteret County) and Robin Cuellar (Buncombe County).

1. How do you build trust when children come to your home?

Cindy: Consistency and stability. They know that after dinner, we're going to read a book, and then we're going to take a bath, and then I'm going to sing this song. Things don't always have to be exactly the same. But in the beginning it's really important to be consistent.

Robin: When a child arrives at our home, they are welcomed like family. We try to have a little "get to know you time" so we can make sure they know what our rules and expectations are. We do not assume they have been used to the same rules we have, because many have had NO rules.

We also give them time to settle in and get to know us a little and start picking up on the routine. I always ask if their room is okay, if they like sheets tucked in, etc. I show them around the house, so they know they have access to whatever they need.

We go about our normal routines, making sure to include them. For example, we make a dinner menu each week. We let any child in our home add to that menu. Our daughter has the same rules, no matter what.

2. What behaviors have you seen before children establish trust?

Cindy: Kids are going to test you. They're going to throw food on the floor, they're going to pee on the floor. All kids do that, but these kids are new, so obviously they're really going to push the envelope to see what the consequences are going to be. Be calm, consistent: "That's not how we do things, this is how we do things." But it's very repetitive. Depending on the age they will try and try and try!

We had a situation where a child was treated as a baby. He was 6 and was barely potty trained. He was in kindergarten but was really like a toddler. He would crawl up into anyone's lap for hours.

Robin: One little one (19 months) would cry when her 13-year-old sister was out of her sight. We would take her in another room and hold her so her sister could eat. We comforted

the sister and told her the little one is fine, she just needs to adjust to us. Within a week, she was sitting next to her sister and no crying! Both were more comfortable; the older one was relieved not to be the caretaker.

We also had a first grader who had not had homework time with his biological family. He was in the habit of not doing it until the next morning with the teacher's assistance. The worst part with this child was that he was so smart, he could have done the work in 20 minutes.

3. How were you able to manage the behaviors while building the relationship?

Cindy: The 6-year-old who was treated like a baby had to learn to trust *himself*, to understand that he was capable. We had to treat him like we wanted him to be, so he could see that in himself. We said to him, "OK, buddy, I need you to slice up this banana, or give everybody some grapes." He didn't think he was able to do that, but he was.

Another aspect of the trust is about being in public: what you say about that child, and how you interact with that child. If you take cupcakes to the school and they say, "Are you Johnny's mommy?" you say, "Yes I am," even if you know he's leaving next week. In that moment they need a mommy, and that's you, regardless of how long you've had them or how long you will have them. We are a family, even if the family is just for now.

Robin: Consistency is the key. Also, the way we explain the rules is not to put them on the spot. We say, "We do this" or "We don't do that," not "You will do this." We, as the adults, also follow the rules, which reinforces the expectations.

4. Have you experienced a honeymoon phase? How can you set the stage for dealing with future problems?

Cindy: With older children, they've created a shell around themselves, and they have figured out how to fit into whatever family they're in. But you can only keep that up for so long. Then other behaviors come out. They're testing: Are you going to keep me? How hard can I push you? Again, structure and consistency and not taking it personally are key. They've had a hard life and they're struggling to make sense of it all. It's a lot more about them than about you.

Incorporating them is important—we're a family, we're a team, we all help with the running of the house. I think we do a disservice to our children, particularly our boys, when we don't teach them basic things about taking care of a house.

Robin: We had a 7-year-old who was good as gold for a few days and then started push-

The most important things you can offer a child are time, security, consistency, and love.

ing boundaries. He didn't respect for women, so he would not listen to, or believe, anything I said. He had to hear it from my husband. After a month or so of being told by my husband that I was right, he started to trust what I was saying.

We have dealt with some dangerous behaviors as well. The same boy was choking our daughter, and it scared her too much to tell us right away. She finally said something a day or two later. We helped him see his behavior was wrong and dangerous. He was upset and did not want his biological family to learn about it.

On another occasion, he was putting a pillow over our daughter's face, and I happened to walk in and stopped it immediately. She thought it was a game, but he was not really playing. We talked with our social workers and they talked with him. They were not allowed to play unsupervised anymore. We also made clear to our daughter that those behaviors were not allowed, and to let us know immediately if they happened. We had no further problems, thank goodness.

We had to learn to trust him as much as he had to trust us. I believe there were things he had seen and did not understand that were at the root of those behaviors. We still gave him the same care and encouragement, and it did not take long for him to see we were not giving up on him. He settled in and accepted us as part of his life. He still calls us. To us, that says it all. We have a familial bond, and he knows we are here for him.

5. What would you say to new foster parents?

Robin: Be willing to be second fiddle for a long time, because nobody is "Mommy" or "Daddy" immediately and sometimes not at all. Seeing families work to reunite can be beautiful—and gut-wrenching. Don't be afraid to have your heart broken. If your heart cannot break, you are in this for the wrong reasons. The most important thing you can offer a child coming to you from what may be a horrible situation is time, security, consistency, and love. Also, if you get a child you just cannot manage, PLEASE ask for help. You will not help the child if you feel helpless. There are always people to provide respite or other assistance.

Seize any opportunity to be with other foster parents. Sometimes you just need someone to vent to, and you can bet there is a foster parent out there who is having, or has had, a similar situation.

Use your social workers. Always call them with any concern you have. It is better to be safe than sorry. Know you are never alone.

Kids' Page

Words and Pictures by and for Children in Foster Care

Vol. 16, No. 1 • November 2011

Advice from youth on responding to challenging behaviors

In the last issue we asked young people in foster care “Did you ever act in a way that was really challenging for your foster parents? What’s the best way to handle this kind of behavior?” Here’s what they had to say.

—John McMahon, Editor



Behaviors that Challenged Foster Parents

I tried to isolate myself as soon as I arrived in the foster home. But every day I had to help the others tend to the garden, or tend to the yard, or do something in the house. I made it clear I did not want to help. My foster parents responded by yelling, screaming, threatening my extra-curricular activities, and worst of all, forcing me to do MORE work. In my opinion that is the worst way to react to a child going through the emotional stress I felt at the time. —Tiara, age 16

If the child acts up, take a toy away from them (their favorite toy). —Janice, age 12

I thought I was the boss of everyone. When decisions were to be made I wanted it to go my way. If they were not my way I was almost always disrespectful. The best way [to respond to] this or any other behavior is for the parent to listen to the kids and talk to them before taking action. —Andrew, age 17

I have been having an attitude for the longest [time]. It’s even hard for me to handle sometimes. . . . As soon as I changed I saw a better outcome. The best way for the parents to handle their child’s behaviors is by putting punishment in place. But before punishing, talk with the child about their behaviors. —Lauren, age 17

I would hit my mom, talk back to her, and throw fits. These would happen when I was feeling mad. . . . I think parents should handle the situation by asking their child to remain calm. Talk firmly to them. . . . Always show the child understanding and love. I think this plan will go well! —Leeann, age 11

My possessive behavior: I always claimed something no matter what it was—clothes, food, toys, even junk. My adoptive family pulled me to the side and told me that it was OK to let go of some items. Letting go of the old things can make room for new and better things. Now I am a little better at not claiming everything. My advice for parents dealing with this type of behavior: pull your child aside and talk to them. Help them recognize it and help them fix it before it gets out of control. —Rachel, age 17

My foster mom told me to lay down and try to sleep. I sassed back. That got me revved up, and I started fussing and screaming. I was like the Incredible Hulk. She tried to calm me down. But that made her frustrated and her calm state was gone. Well, the first thing to do is stay calm. Then you’re in a good state. Don’t just jump in and try to take charge. Let the kids calm down and be in a good state also. Take big, deep, hard breaths. The small soft ones don’t get your aggression out. If you do this, you should have control over the problem. —Zach, age 13

The young people above received \$15 for having their letters published. To read other work by youth, see the online version of this issue.

Sara, age 17

1

I was sneaking out. I had been doing it for a while, thinking my parents wouldn’t find out. One morning my foster mom came and told me to get up. I could tell by her voice she was not a happy camper.

The thing I remember most is that I was not scared. She always told me she would never yell. She kept her word. She sat me down and had a very strong, sturdy talk with me. She explained the danger I put myself in, how I lost trust and, yes, she was disappointed in me. I believe the way that Mrs. Pat handled the situation was very smart, and safe. She also explained that she had alarms put on the windows and made a rule that no doors are to be closed, unless we are getting dressed.

She and Charles see a light in me no one [else] has in my whole life... They have encouraged me “to be who you are, not someone you’re not”....

The best advice I could give [to a foster parent] is to get your thoughts together, talk to the child. Show that you are disappointed, but also show that you are still there and you will not give up. . . . Actually care for the kids. Do not give up, even if it is a difficult problem. Sara received \$100 for winning first prize.

For some reason they see a light in me no one else ever has.

Stuart, age 17

2

Life had taught me the people who survive are the greedy and the selfish. I believed I stood alone against the world. . . . I hated what I couldn’t understand, and “love” was something I could not relate to. . . . Right and wrong did not exist in my decisions—it was all about the money.

Most foster parents would have probably confronted the issue. With some people this would work, but not me. I became defensive if confronted about anything. My foster parents didn’t confront me. All they did was simply show me what love was—not by words, but by actions. They didn’t give it a name, but now I knew what people meant when they mentioned this “love.”

Today I still dislike the word, but I know it’s real. My point is that sometimes confronting an issue, regardless of what it is, will just make the foster kid defensive. Simply show them, let them see with their own eyes. After all, this is how we grow and learn. Stuart received \$50 for winning second prize.

They showed me what love was—not by words, but through actions.

Kathy, age 15

3

My challenge was trying to open up and talk to my guardian. This may not sound like a challenge, but it was and is, because my guardians could not get to know me or find out how to help me. . . .

Now I can sit down and talk to my guardians. My guardians helped me by showing me I could trust them; also they sat down and talked to me when I needed them. My social workers and court counselors also helped me through my journey. They showed me that they would stick up for me, no matter what. Everyone took the time to get to know me and see that I am a funny person, so that when we would talk it was not always so serious. They did not make me feel like I was being interrogated and I was able to relax a little.

I know every person is not the same, but I hope I will be able to help children and teens like me find their voices in a great team of people that they can trust the way I trust mine. I wish this so that we can all get the help we need and find a family that is best for me. Kathy received \$25 for winning third prize.

I would not open up and talk to my guardians.

Getting to know SaySo by Lauren Zingraff, SaySo Program Coordinator

SaySo's Assistant Program Coordinator

Chaney Stokes is a former foster youth who has been involved with SaySo since she was 15 years old. She entered foster care during her freshman year of high school and was in and out of care through her senior year. Chaney graduated from high school in 2004. She served on the SaySo board of directors for several years, representing Region 6. Chaney transitioned into the position of a SaySo Regional Assistant, and became our first Assistant Program Coordinator in August 2010. Chaney hopes to be involved in making positive changes that will help to improve the foster care system. Chaney is a wonderful example of not allowing your past to determine your future. She wants to continue to be an inspiration to other young people. Please say hello to Chaney when you see her at SaySo events across the state!



Chaney Stokes

Become a SaySo Regional Assistant

SaySo Regional Assistants (SRAs) are alumni of substitute care who provide regional support for SaySo. These part-time, paid positions promote and enhance local chapter development, speaking engagements, and other LINKS events. Having regional representatives helps SaySo support local chapters and recruit members and community supporters statewide. With SRAs, SaySo has begun the process of developing an alumni response to the call for "follow up" action after a young person leaves foster care.

Some of the experiences our SaySo Regional Assistants have had include serving on our board of directors, participating at SaySo functions, and working as legislative pages at the NC General Assembly. Our SRAs have also made presentations at Court Improvement Conferences, the annual foster and adoptive parent conference, training for judges, Guardian ad Litem orientations, and gatherings of future lawyers and social workers.

Currently we are seeking SRAs in regions 1, 2, 5, and 6. Applicants must be between the ages of 18-26, have reliable transportation, and pass a criminal background check.

Interested? Contact Lauren Zingraff (lauren.zingraff@ilrinc.com; 800/820-0001).



Rodney Alston (above) and Nicole Lyght (below), SaySo Regional Assistants



SaySo Local Chapters

SaySo is excited to announce new chapters in Randolph and Gaston counties. We now have 24 local chapters across North Carolina. Chapters represent youths from a specific region, agency, or group home. Local chapters are very important to SaySo: they provide a place for SaySo members to meet and help support the mission and bylaws of SaySo. They also contribute through:

Fundraising. There have been bake sales, car washes, even presentations to local churches. SaySo is a 501C-3 organization, so contributions are tax-deductible. Local chapters decide what to do with the money they raise. In the past chapters have used funds to support local activities (e.g., a pizza party or field trip), to purchase needed items for youth in foster care (e.g., duffle bags/backpacks), and to support SaySo Corporate, which helps fund annual statewide events such as SaySo Saturday and SaySo Survivor.

Community service. We have been very successful each year with the "Make a Difference Day" campaign, which is held nationally on the 4th Saturday of October. For many years we have held the "Give a Child a Smile" suitcase campaign for youth in foster care. We hold an annual event here at our headquarters in Durham and several of our chapters also have corresponding suitcase drives. Other chapter community service activities include volunteering at soup kitchens, collecting food for local food banks, and helping to build Habitat for Humanity houses.

Advocacy. SaySo's motto is "Speaking Out Today, While Making Changes for Tomorrow." In keeping with this, SaySo youth speak out at local DSS agencies, court conferences, churches, foster and adoptive parent training, and college social work classes. Through local chapters, we have had young people featured in the newspaper and on the radio.

Chaney Stokes has been instrumental in starting several chapters across the state. It's easy to do—you only need a few people to get going! Chaney would be happy to help you start a chapter; contact her at chaney.stokes@ilrinc.com or 800/820-0001.

Visit Us Online

SaySo has recently upgraded its website! You can find out all the latest SaySo news and happenings, as well as register for one of our many events. Our annual events include "Teen Future Link-Up" conferences, "It's My Transition" workshops, SaySo Saturday, Legislative Page Week, and SaySo Survivor. Through our site you can meet the SaySo team, including our youth board of directors and adult supporters. Check it out at www.saysoinc.org.

SaySo Regions in North Carolina

Entries with asterisks (*) have local SaySo chapters.

1. Mountains

Alexander	Madison
Alleghany	McDowell
Ashe	Mitchell
Avery	Polk
Buncombe	Rutherford
Burke	Swain
*Caldwell	Transylvania
*Catawba	Watauga
Cherokee	Wilkes
Clay	Yancey
*Crossnore	
Graham	
Haywood	
Henderson	
Jackson	
Macon	

2. Charlotte Area

Cabarrus
Cleveland
*Gaston
Lincoln
*Mecklenburg
*Rowan
Stanley
*Union

3. Triad

*Alamance
Caswell
Davidson
Davie
*Forsyth
Franklin
Granville
*Guilford
Person
*Randolph
Rockingham
*Stokes
*Surry
Vance
Warren
Yadkin

4. Triangle

Anson
Bladen
Chatham
*Cumberland
*Durham
Harnett
Hoke
Johnson
Lee
Montgomery
*Moore
*Orange
*Richmond
*Robeson
Sampson
Scotland
*Wake

5. Northeast

Beaufort	Perquimans
Bertie	*Pitt
Camden	Tyrrell
Chowan	Washington
Currituck	*Wayne
Dare	Wilson
Edgecombe	
Gates	
Greene	
*Halifax	
Hertford	
Hyde	
Martin	
Nash	
Northampton	
Pasquotank	

6. Southeast

Brunswick
Carteret
Columbus
*Craven
Duplin
Jones
Lenoir
New Hanover
*Onslow
Pamlico
Pender

Child traumatic stress: A primer for resource parents

Reprinted with permission from "Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents" by National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (www.nctsn.org)

What Is Traumatic Stress?

By the time most children enter the foster care system they have already been exposed to a wide range of painful and distressing experiences. Although all of these experiences are stressful, experiences are considered **traumatic** when they threaten the life or physical integrity of the child or of someone critically important to the child (such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling). Traumatic events lead to intense physical and emotional reactions, including:

- An overwhelming sense of terror, helplessness, and horror
- Automatic physical responses such as rapid heart rate, trembling, dizziness, or loss of bladder or bowel control

Types of Traumatic Stress: Acute Trauma

A single traumatic event that lasts for a limited period of time is called an acute trauma. A natural disaster, dog bite, or motor vehicle accident are all examples of acute traumas. Over the course of even a brief traumatic event, a child may go through a variety of complicated sensations, thoughts, feelings, and physical responses that change from moment to moment as the child appraises the danger faced and the prospects of safety. As the event unfolds, the child's pounding heart, out-of-control emotions, loss of bladder control, and physical reactions are frightening in themselves and contribute to his or her sense of being overwhelmed.

Types of Traumatic Stress: Chronic Trauma

Chronic trauma occurs when a child experiences many traumatic events, often over a long period of time. Chronic trauma may refer to multiple and varied events—such as a child who is exposed to domestic violence, is involved in a serious car accident, and then becomes a victim of community violence—or recurrent events of the same kind, such as physical or sexual abuse.

Even in cases of chronic trauma, there are often particular events or moments within those events that stand out as particularly horrifying. For example, one little boy reported "I keep thinking about the night Mommy was so drunk I was sure she was going to kill my sister."

Chronic trauma may result in any or all of the symptoms of acute trauma, but these problems may be more severe and more long lasting. The effects of trauma are often cumulative, as each event serves to remind the child of prior trauma and reinforce its negative impact. A child exposed to a series of traumas may become more overwhelmed by each subsequent event and more convinced that the world is not a safe place. Over time, a child who has felt overwhelmed over and over again may become more sensitive and less able to tolerate ordinary, everyday stress.



What about Neglect?

Neglect is defined as the failure to provide for a child's basic physical, medical, educational, and emotional needs. Since neglect results from "omissions" in care, rather than "acts of commission" (such as physical and sexual abuse), it might seem less traumatic. However, for an infant or very young child who is completely dependent on adults for care, being left alone in a crib, in a wet, dirty diaper, suffering from the pain of hunger and exhausted from hours of crying, neglect feels like a very real threat to survival.

For older children, not having proper care, attention, and supervision often opens the door to other traumatic events, such as accidents, sexual abuse, and community violence. Neglect can make children feel abandoned and worthless, and reduce their ability to recover from traumatic events.

How Do Children Respond to Trauma?

Every child reacts to trauma differently. What is very distressing for one child may be less so for another. A child's response to a traumatic event will vary depending on factors such as:

- The child's age and developmental stage
- The child's perception of the danger faced
- Whether the child was the victim or a witness
- The child's relationship to the victim or perpetrator
- The child's past experience with trauma
- The adversities the child faces in the aftermath of the trauma
- The presence/availability of adults who can offer help and protection

Children who have been through trauma may show a range of traumatic stress reactions. These are grouped into three categories:

Hyperarousal: The child is jumpy, nervous, easily startled.

Reexperiencing: Images, sensations, or memories of the traumatic event come uncontrollably into the child's mind. At its most extreme, reexperiencing may make a child feel back in the trauma.

Avoidance and withdrawal: The child feels numb, frozen, shut down, or cut off from normal life and other people. The child may withdraw from friends and formerly pleasurable activities. Some children, usually those who have been abused, disconnect or withdraw internally during a traumatic event. They feel detached and separate from their bodies, and may even lose track of time and space. Children who have learned to dissociate to protect themselves may then dissociate during any stressful or emotional event.

Traumatic stress reactions can lead to a range of troubling, confusing, and sometimes alarming behaviors and emotional responses in children. They may have:

- Trouble learning, concentrating, or taking in new information
- Problems going to sleep, staying asleep, or nightmares
- Emotional instability; being moody one minute and cheerful the next, or suddenly becoming angry or aggressive

When Trauma Is Caused by Loved Ones: Complex Trauma

Some trauma experts use the term **complex trauma** to describe a specific kind of chronic trauma and its effects on children. Complex trauma refers to multiple traumatic events that begin at a very early age and are caused by the actions—or inactions—of adults who should have been caring for and protecting the child. When trauma begins early and is caused by the very people whom the child relies on for love and protection, it can have profound effects on a child's healthy physical and psychological development. Children who have experienced complex trauma have had to cope with chronically overwhelming and unmanageable stresses almost entirely on their own. As a result, these children often:

- Have difficulty regulating their feelings and emotions
- Find it hard to feel safe
- Have difficulty forming trusting relationships
- Find it hard to navigate and adjust to life's changes
- Display extreme emotional and physical responses to stress

Resilience and the Role of Resource Parents

The ability to recover from traumatic events is called resilience. In general, children who feel safe, capable, and lovable are better able to "bounce back" from traumatic events.

continued page 11



Books on the nightstand by Becky Burmester

The theme for this issue is overcoming parenting challenges. (Note to editor: please don't choose a topic quite so personal to us for the May issue!)

Joe and I try very hard to be good enough parents. We are at least experienced enough to know that there are no perfect parents.

All foster parents are exposed to some examples of horrific parenting—things we would NEVER do. One of the keys to successful fostering is remembering that no one intends to be a bad parent. People parent as they were parented or as differently from the way they were parented as they can manage with the resources they have.

We must also remember that no matter what happens, these are the children's parents. The children will worry about their well-being, about turning out "bad" like them, and about how to be happy in foster care even though it hurts their parents. All this adds to the baggage the children carry.

So what's "on the nightstand" that might help us as we struggle to parent other people's children?

Rise Magazine

Rise, a magazine written by and for parents affected by the child welfare system, really helps Joe and me walk in the birth parents' shoes. I believe that regularly reading Rise will help you to do this, too.

One of the frequently shared horror stories about foster parenting involves **THE VISITS**. Regular readers of Rise gain a better understanding of why the parents do and say the things they do during visits. This information will not improve the behavior of the child prior to or following visits. But, it could arm us with information that will allow us to reframe our reactions.

Twelve step programs have as one of their foundational principles the concept that the only person that we can change is ourselves. Reading Rise helps foster parents see a different perspective, one in which parents' anger can be seen as hurt or self defense, promises as a desperate desire for things to be different, and unneeded gifts of toys or clothes as acts of nurture and expressions of love.

With a better understanding of the birth parents' perspectives, foster parents will be better equipped to talk with children about what visitation is like for their parents. Providing words to describe feelings can help children and foster parents get a handle on what it all means.

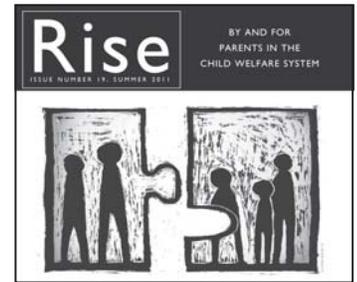
Foster parent support groups may wish to use Rise as the basis for monthly meetings several times a year. Shared parenting needs to be a two-way street. Children's parents have been there, done that, and overcome: they have much to teach us.

Rise is published three times a year. Issues are available free at www.risemagazine.org. If you do not have Internet access at home, the public library is a reliable Internet source and provides printing services at a low cost.

* * * *

On a personal note, our family has hit a stretch of very difficult parenting, a time when Joe and I question our ability to keep on keeping on. It shouldn't have hit us like a sharp blow to the gut, but it has.

School has started again for our son on the autism spectrum. He



has made tremendous gains in the last year. But why did we expect things to be different, better, easier for him and for us?

We know progress is not a straight line. We have two grown children. Over 80 children have shared our home for periods of time ranging from a few days to years. We have had ample opportunity to learn that there are good times and bad and that during the bad times it can be hard to see that this particular bad patch will lead to more good times.

Please share books, articles, magazines that should be "on the nightstand." Contact me at becky.burmester@mindspring.com or 919/870-9968. **Please:** leave your contact information twice on my voice mail. If I can't understand your number I cannot return your call.

And keep reading!

Child traumatic stress: A primer from page 10

There are many factors in a child's life that can promote resilience and help a child see the world as manageable, understandable, and meaningful. Some of the factors that can increase resilience include:

- A strong, supportive relationship with a competent and caring adult
- A connection with a positive role model or mentor
- Recognition and nurturance of their strengths and abilities
- Some sense of control over their own lives
- Membership in a community larger than themselves, whether their neighborhood, faith-based group, scout troop, extended family, or a social cause

Regardless of the child's age or the types of trauma experienced, healing is possible. With nurture and support, children who have been through trauma can regain trust, confidence, and hope. Resource parents are critical in helping children in their care to

build resilience and overcome the emotional and behavioral effects of child traumatic stress. By creating a structured, predictable environment, listening to the child's story at the child's pace, and working with professionals trained in trauma and its treatment, resource parents can make all the difference.

Reprinted with permission from "Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents." Copyright 2010 by National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. (www.nctsn.org)

Learn More Online

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network is an excellent resource for resource families, child welfare professionals, and others who want to learn more about how to help children affected by trauma: www.nctsn.org.



- Does your child have special needs?
- Do you need help finding information, resources, and services?
- Do you want to know more about a special need, disability, or diagnosis?

The Family Support Network™ of North Carolina is made up of local Family Support Network™ affiliates and the Family Support Network™ University Office providing:

- Information & Referral
- Education & Outreach
- Parent-to-Parent Support
- Research & Evaluation

800.852.0042, www.fsnn.org

Hablamos español

Family Support Network of North Carolina
Serving families since 1985 through a network of affiliated local programs

Domestic violence's impact on children by Kyra Gottesman Evans

Living with domestic violence can take a lasting toll on children. Nationwide, it is estimated that between 3.3 million and 10 million children are at risk of witnessing domestic violence each year. In families where there is domestic violence, most children—some estimate as many as 90 percent—see and hear it.

"Children are the secondary victims of domestic violence," says Joan Suflita, director of children's services at the Emergency Shelter Program/A Special Place in Hayward, CA. "It is quite clear that while the violence may not be directed at them, they are greatly affected by it."

Researchers and caregivers find that children who have witnessed domestic violence often show similar emotional, physical, and behavioral disturbances as children who have themselves been victims of abuse. Many children from homes where parental abuse is prevalent suffer feelings of anger, fear, guilt, shame, confusion, and helplessness. Some become withdrawn and others unusually aggressive. Sleep disorders—insomnia, nightmares, bedwetting, etc.—are common. Children of battered mothers have high rates of emotional problems like depression and sometimes show delays in learning. Many develop physical symptoms including frequent colds, headaches, or upset stomachs. Some lose respect for the victim; others become extremely protective or dependent.

Confusion and guilt

Children from homes with domestic violence, says Julie Murphy, director of children's programs for Battered Women's Alternatives (BWA) in Concord, CA, typically "suffer guilt, feeling that something is wrong with them or that they are responsible for the violence. 'If only I'd done my homework on time. If only I'd gone to bed... Dad wouldn't have hit Mom.'"

Children also struggle with conflicting emotions. Five-year-old Cathy, for example, said she hated Daddy for hurting Mommy, but she also missed and loved her daddy because he took her to the zoo." They are very confused about how they could love and hate a person at the same time," Murphy says. "It's a lot for them to sort through." These feelings of helplessness and confusion often lead children to attempt a coping strategy of denying that the violence is occurring. These children may be able to express their feelings only through play, art, and writing.



Shelter workers asked 10-year-old Jose, "What do you do when violence is going on at home?" He responded by drawing a picture of a hand dripping with blood, holding a gun. Beneath the picture he wrote: "I close my eyes. I hum to myself. I listen to music. I shake my head. I say out loud, 'This is not happening.'" Beneath those words, he drew a snake.

Another common response is for children to focus on their concern for mom. Since infancy, 9-year-old Tara had witnessed the repeated abuse of her mother by her father. When she and her mother arrived at the shelter, Tara, an only child, was very verbal about what she had seen her father do to her mother. Tara was glad to be at the shelter, away from violence, but suspicious the safety wouldn't last. She was deeply concerned about her mother, but didn't trust her to stay away from the man who had beaten her for so many years.

"Her first concern was for her mother," says Murphy. "She was very protective. This is not unusual. Many of the children feel protective of their mothers and worry about their own safety second or not at all."

Reflecting aggression

Many child witnesses to domestic violence copy the aggression they've seen in the batterer. Phil, for example, was seven when he arrived at BWA's Rollie Mullen Shelter and Transitional Housing with his mother and two-year-old sister. He was extremely violent and verbally abusive toward his mother and the shelter's female staff. "You can't tell me what to do, you're just women," he told them. He called the other children names and physically assaulted them. When he finally began telling people how he felt, he said, "I'm really mad at mom because she kept me there with dad. I hate him, but I love him, too."

"It's not unusual for older male children to be angry with their mothers and side with the power person,

the father, in the relationship," says Murphy. "The fathers often sabotage the relationship between the older males and the mothers so that the child begins to think, 'maybe Dad was justified.'"

The aggression children have witnessed also affects relationships with other children. "Their perspective on relationships is so skewed that they have no idea how to share or cooperate," Murphy explains. "Their way of saying 'hello' may be to push someone down, then they don't understand why the other child gets upset."

"Just a couple of years ago," she adds, "I would have said it was only the male children who were aggressive, but now I see very aggressive males and females."

When 5-year-old Nellie, for example, arrived at a shelter with her mother, her response to almost any physical contact, especially an accidental bump by another person, was to raise her fist. "Violence or aggression is such a quick response for these children," says Madonna Datzman, coordinator for BWA's transitional housing. "They often perpetuate the abusiveness they've witnessed at home with other children."

Violent fallout

Children of battered women are also more likely than other children to suffer physical and/or sexual abuse by their fathers or their mothers' abusive boyfriends. Researchers estimate that at least half of men who batter their female partners also physically abuse the children. In addition, women are much more likely to use physical discipline with their children when they themselves are being battered, according to a report

from the California State Justice Institute.

In most cases, says a report by the National Center on Women and Family Law, "removing the children from the batterer's environment and placing them with the mother ends the child abuse."

Lasting harm

Witnessing domestic violence can also interfere with a child's healthy development. "Children who witness violence early in life may view the world as unpredictable, possibly dangerous or chaotic. The basic attachment of the child to the adult is at risk. This early relationship development is profound and life-lasting," Suflita explains. A 1985 survey by family-violence researchers Straus and Gelles, for example, found that these children tend to have problems ranging from difficulty in making friends to arrests for juvenile offenses.

Many researchers have found a connection between witnessing violence in childhood and using violence as an adult. A 1980 study by Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, for example, showed that boys who had seen their fathers attack their mothers were three times as likely to become batterers as boys raised in nonviolent homes.

"Living with violence can take a lasting toll on children and interfere with developmental growth," conclude Amy Bamforth and Maxine Weinreb of Boston's Child Witness to Violence Project. "Adults can mediate the consequences by being exquisitely aware of these effects and intervening to provide a safe environment."

From the July-Aug. 1997 issue of the Children's Advocate, published by Action Alliance for Children

North Carolina Resources

Community resources are available to help children who have witnessed domestic violence. For more information, contact the Center for Child and Family Health (919/419-3474; <http://www.ccfhnc.org>) or the NC Child Treatment Program (<http://www.cfar.unc.edu/Home/FindingTherapist.rails>).

The North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, through funding from the NC Department of Health and Human Services/Division of Social Services, is spearheading a project to address the needs and resources for children exposed to domestic violence. Through the Child Advocacy and Services Enhancement (CASE) Project, state and local agencies will devise a statewide plan to promote awareness around child exposure to domestic violence; increase the capacity of local agencies to serve children and youth using trauma-informed and culturally sensitive models; and influence public policy to build the research and resource base to meet the needs of children exposed to domestic violence. If you have questions about the CASE Project or are seeking assistance regarding domestic violence, please call the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence at 888/232-9124 or 919/956-9124.

Learn more about managing behaviors by Tiffany Price, MSW

Helping children manage their behaviors can be one of a parent's toughest jobs.

Making friends, using talents in school, and having positive experiences with family members are important for children, so when behavior gets in the way of a child's abilities to succeed in these areas we do everything we can think of to help. Sometimes we see hopeful changes. At other times we can't see progress. We may even get to a point where we feel overwhelmed by the weight of power struggles or safety issues.

One of the keys to knowing how to prevent and respond to problem behavior is figuring out the source of the behavior. It's difficult to identify a strategy until we understand something about the need a child is expressing through his behavior.

Some behavior falls within a range of what's typical for children of a certain developmental age and can be addressed through general parenting strategies such as communication skill-building, increased supervision, and positive reinforcement. In other cases, factors such as a history of trauma, sensory issues (sensory overload or under-stimulation), or mental health issues can contribute to concerning behavior and require additional parenting strategies.

When you want to do the best for a child, yourself, and your family, where can you turn for information and guidance?

Basic Local Resources

- *Foster care licensing and placement agencies or local foster parent support groups* may offer behavior management workshops based on interest and available resources.
- *Pediatric offices* may periodically offer workshops for parents on behavior-related topics. When offered, there is frequently a charge for these workshops.
- *The North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association's (NCFAPA) Annual Conference* typically includes workshops that help foster parents understand and respond to challenging behavior.

More Advanced Resources

Becoming a Therapeutic Foster Parent is a 10-hour course developed by the NC Division of Social Services and offered by a number of agencies throughout North Carolina who supervise therapeutic foster parents. Managing behaviors and safety planning are prominent training topics. Other agencies use *Together Facing the Challenge* or other training to help therapeutic foster parents gain skills in behavior management.

Books and Internet Resources

There are many books and websites devoted to behavior management. Here are just a few to get you started in your search for helpful material.

- *FosterParentCollege.com* offers more than a dozen online behavior management courses. The courses educate parents on the clinical aspects of various behavior problems and provide instruction on interventions for behaviors such as anger outbursts, sleep problems, running away, and self-harm. The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse gives Foster Parent College a scientific rating of 3, indicating that there is promising research evidence about the effectiveness of its training.
- *Off-Road Parenting*, a handbook by Caesar Pacifici, Patricia Chamberlain, and Lee White, includes a DVD that presents realistic family stories and lets viewers select ages of children and pathways for a situation's outcome. Many of the scenarios highlight foster families and cover a range of parenting techniques from positive reinforcement, to time out, to behavior contracts. The handbook reinforces the strategies and takes a light-hearted look at parenting challenges through cartoon illustrations.
- *Extreme Off Road Parenting*, is an interactive DVD and discussion guide for parents of young children with temper tantrums. It is recommended for parents who have tried their best, who have used good parenting approaches, but who find their children continue to tantrum, explode, and throw fits. It can be ordered from www.SocialLearning.com.
- *Parenting Wisely (PAW)*, a self-administered, highly interactive CD ROM-based program, teaches parents and children (aged 9-18) skills to improve their relationships and decrease conflict through support and behavior management. SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices lists Parenting Wisely on its website. For more information visit <http://www.familyworksinc.com>.
- *The Explosive Child* by Ross W. Greene explains why some children have intense outbursts and aggression and gives parents strategies to help children improve communication, self-regulation, and problem-solving.
- *Your Defiant Teen—10 Steps to Resolve Conflict and Rebuild Your Relationship* offers hope for parents who find



themselves stuck in standoffs with their teen. Authors Russell Barkley and Arthur Robin provide practical information and numerous checklists and worksheets that give parents an opportunity to practice and teach problem-solving skills.

- *Raising a Sensory Smart Child* addresses the unique challenges of parenting a child or teen with sensory integration issues. Co-written by occupational therapist Lindsey Biel and Nancy Peske, the parent of a child with sensory integration issues, this book gives practical, down-to-earth information on behavior management strategies as well as encouragement for parents.
- The tip sheet, *Recognizing and Coping with Signs of Distress in Young Children*, explains children's stress responses and identifies supportive techniques parents can use to help a child de-escalate challenging behavior and safely recover from heightened distress. You can find it online at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ceed/publications/tipsheets/preschool/beamsignsofdistress.pdf>.
- *Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning* is a site that offers much helpful information for the parents of young children, including tip sheets on Responding to Your Child's Bite, Teaching Your Child about Feelings, and Supporting Your Child's Relationship Building Skills. You can find it online at: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html>.

Ask other foster parents, your child's social worker, school counselor, mental health professional or members of the child and family team for additional resources they recommend.

Keep in mind that each child is unique, and it may take many tries with different approaches to find what works best.



A reader asks ...

Where can I turn for help in the years after the adoption?

I adopted my daughter from foster care a few years ago. Some days I feel like I'm losing my mind. I'm not sure if what is happening is typical of all kids her age or if her behavior is related to her past experiences. What should I do?

Luckily for you and other adoptive parents across our state, services have been developed specifically with you in mind. North Carolina knows that families created by adoption are different from families created by birth. We understand that your needs may be different than another adoptive family right down the street. Because adoption is a lifelong experience, it is our responsibility to provide you with support to help your family stay healthy and stay together.

We call this support *post-adoption services*. We have grouped the 100 counties across the state into 11 regions. The NC Division of Social Services has contracted with different agencies to provide post-adoption services in each region. These agencies (and regions) were changed recently, so be sure to review the information below to see which agency provides services in your county.

Whether you need help advocating for your child in school, navigating the mental health system, learning about your child's diagnosis, dealing with a crisis, or just need someone to talk to, these agencies can help. They have adoption specialists who can help you determine whether the issues going on are part of normal childhood development or if they may stem from your child's past.

As a society we have learned a lot over the last decade, not only about adoption but about childhood trauma. We know that trauma can alter brain chemistry and have a lifelong impact on a person's physical and mental health, school experience, and social relationships. The agencies the Division of Social Services has contracted with understand past trauma and will help you receive the most appropriate services for your family.

Support may include information and referral services, education and training, support groups for parents and adoptees, respite care, advocacy services, crisis assistance, case management and service planning, in-home family preservation, counseling, or mentoring. Services may differ by region, but one thing is true across the state: these agencies really want to help you. You do not need to go through this alone. All of the services are free. Why not take advantage of them?

If you know other adoptive families in your area, please tell them about these free services. If you are a foster parent considering adoption, know that our support does not end after the adoption is finalized. As an adoptive parent, you are making a commitment for a lifetime and we will be here when you need us.

Response by the NC Division of Social Services. If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina, send it to us using the *Fostering Perspectives* contact information found in the box above.

Because adoption is a lifelong experience, it's our responsibility to provide you with support to help your family stay healthy and stay together.

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Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Jordan Institute for Families, 1459 Sand Hill Road, No. 6 (DSS), Candler NC 28715. Tel: 828/670-5051; Fax: 828/670-5053; E-mail: jdmcmaho@unc.edu.

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Newsletter Staff. Kathy Dobbs (Editor-in-Chief); John McMahon (Editor); Mellicent Blythe (Assistant Editor)

Mission. *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare professionals and foster, kinship, and adoptive parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system in our state can exchange ideas.

Disclaimer. The opinions and beliefs expressed herein are not necessarily those of the NC Division of Social Services or the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

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Online. www.fosteringperspectives.org

Subscribe Online. To be notified about online issues, e-mail jdmcmaho@unc.edu with "FP subscribe" in the subject line.

References. See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.

Who Adopts Children from Foster Care?

Most children adopted from foster care in NC are adopted by their foster parents. Of the children adopted in Federal Fiscal Year 2005-06, 54% were adopted by foster parents. The rest were adopted by relatives (23.3%), non-relatives (22.6%), and step-parents (0.1%) (USDHHS, 2008).

Post-Adoption Support Providers in North Carolina • July 1, 2011

REGION 1

Barium Springs, call 800/320-4157
Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Transylvania, EBCI

REGION 2

Children's Home Society, call 800/778-9955
Avery, Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Yancey

REGION 3

Barium Springs, call 866/667-3398
Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Watauga, Wilkes

REGION 4

Children's Home Society, call 800/778-9955
Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Stanly, Union

REGION 5

Children's Home Society
Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, Yadkin call 800/632-1400, Ext. 353

Iredell and Rowan call 800/778-9955

REGION 6

Children's Home Society, call 800/632-1400 Ext. 353
Alamance, Caswell, Chatham, Guilford, Orange, Person, Randolph

REGION 7

Another Choice, call 800/774-3534
Anson, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Scotland

REGION 8

Center For Child And Family Health, call 855/596-5015
Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Nash, Johnston, Vance, Wake, Warren, Wayne, Wilson

REGION 9

Children's Home Society, call 910/703-1859
Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover, Pender, Robeson, Sampson

REGION 10

Children's Home Society, call 866/73-4173
Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, Washington

REGION 11

Easter Seals UCP, call 252/636-6007
Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, Greene, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, Pamlico, Pitt



Help us find families for these children

For more information on these children or adoption in general, call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 <www.adoptnckids.org>



Allison (age 9)

Allison is a beautiful girl with a smile that will steal your heart. She likes writing and listening to stories and enjoys sports such as swimming and gymnastics. Allison also enjoys playing with Barbie Dolls and toys. She is sympathetic to others' feelings and likes to make adults happy. Allison talks most about wanting a mom and a dog. She likes teenagers and would do well with

older siblings. Allison needs weekly visits for her visual needs.



Brion (age 14)

Brion is a bright, articulate, savvy young man. He enjoys visiting the beach and the mountains, building models, and drawing. Brion likes sports and especially enjoys basketball, football, swimming, and wrestling. He would like to be a police officer or serve in the military, as he thinks it would be really cool to get rid of the bad guys before they can hurt people. Brion

needs a family who is patient and willing to work with him to tear down the walls that he has built to protect himself. Brion deserves the chance to learn that trusting and caring can open one's life to great possibilities.



Cecil (age 13)

A loveable child, Cecil is mild mannered, inquisitive, easygoing, and agreeable. He loves playing drums and playing games on the computer. Cecil wants to play sports. Cecil has a good relationship with his peers and foster brother. Cecil's foster mother says he just wants to be loved and feel as though he belongs in the family. Cecil loves his teacher, and the feeling is mutual. Cecil states that he wants to be a police officer and a drummer when he grows up. Cecil wants to be adopted so he can be a part of a family—he wants a mom, dad, and a brother or sister. Cecil would benefit from other children in the home.

benefit from other children in the home.



Derick (age 12)

Derick is reserved, kind, and competitive. He can be a perfectionist as well, taking pride in his personal appearance: he likes to look neat and clean at all times. Derick enjoys reading, playing football and basketball, as well as art and drawing. Derick tends to get along better with adults than his peers. However, he responds very well to younger children and

enjoys being a big brother. Described as very bright, Derick is open to the possibility of being adopted. He would like a two parent home with an African American family. He loves dogs and says he wants a family that will allow dogs in the home.



Ethan (age 15)

Ethan is a handsome young man with long, beautiful eyelashes. He is friendly, easygoing, and articulate. Ethan can be very helpful and often practices his gentlemanly manners. He enjoys playing on the computer, video games, and talking on the phone with his sister or friends. Ethan is an avid sports fan and athlete and hopes to become a professional baseball

player. He hopes to find a loving family who will understand that he is not perfect and that he will make mistakes. Ethan will benefit most from a two-parent family with a positive male role model.



Jacob (age 9)

Jacob is extremely sweet, loving and helpful. He has an easy-going disposition and is fun to be around. He loves to dress well and is proud of his clothes and shoes. He adores being the center of attention. Jacob is typically a good student; his favorite subject is reading. He receives some extra assistance in school to help him meet his full potential. He will do best in a family experienced with children who have

special needs. It is preferable for him to be the only child. He has a medical condition that will require close monitoring by his caregivers.



LaDymond (age 9)

LaDymond is a happy spirit. Playful, likable, and eager to please, she has resilience and a determination to succeed. She loves to talk and to be the center of attention. She likes pretty things and loves to dress up. Some of LaDymond's favorite things to do are ride bicycles, roller skate, and watch cartoons. She also loves going to school, singing, and making crafts. LaDymond would benefit from a family where

she can experience stability, acceptance, and unconditional love. She has a lot of energy and will do best in an active family. She deserves a family of her own.

Chris (age 8) and Mercedes (age 7)

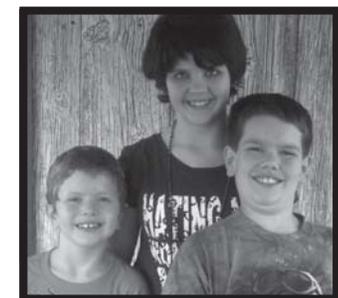
Christopher is a sweet, mild tempered boy who gets along well with just about everyone and is passionate about trains! He enjoys playing with his electric train set and he also likes to watch TV and read books about trains. When he plays outdoors, Christopher stays active running, jumping, and riding his bike. Mercedes is adorable, confident, and



friendly. Even though she enjoys dolls and coloring, Mercedes is not a girlie girl; she likes rough and tumble play and wants things to go her way. She is a fast learner and is quickly catching up in academics. We are looking for a two-parent adoptive family in which Christopher and Mercedes can be the youngest children. Any family considered should have previous parenting experience. The children express a desire for African American parents.

Sebastian (age 8), Reva (age 11), and Alex (age 10)

Sebastian is rambunctious, playful, quirky and sweet. He enjoys playing video games and riding his bike and scooter. He loves the beach. His best subject in school is math. He would like to be a fireman.



Reva is easy going, funny, tender, and artistic. She makes friends easily and is very helpful both at church and at school. Some of Reva's favorite activities include dressing up, walking her dogs, playing basketball, reading, drawing, skating, and watching WWE wrestling on TV.

Alex is imaginative, kind, fun, and playful. He makes friends easily. Alex's favorite activities include playing video games, riding his bike and his scooter, and playing baseball. Alex wants to go to college and he would like to be a professional baseball player when he grows up.

These siblings will do best in an active family where they are the only children. Sebastian, Reva, and Alex children enjoy attending church and have requested a family that actively participates in a church family.

Writing Contest

FIRST PRIZE: \$100 • SECOND PRIZE: \$50 • THIRD PRIZE: \$25

If you are under 18 and are or have been in foster care, please send us a letter or short essay in response to the following questions:

Who would you invite to a child and family team meeting?

Why would you invite this person/these people?

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 2, 2012

E-mail submissions to jdmcmaho@unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, NC Division of Social Services, 1459 Sand Hill Rd., No. 6 (DSS), Candler, NC 28715. Include your name, age, address, social security number (used to process awards only, confidentiality will be protected) and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards specified above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published, for which they will also receive a cash award.

Seeking Artwork and Other Writing Submissions

Submissions can be on any theme. There is no deadline for non-contest submissions: submit your work at any time. If sent via U.S. Mail, artwork should be sent flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.

Important Background

Child and family team meetings (CFTs) are meetings where DSS brings family members and their community supports together to create, implement, and update a plan with the child, youth, and family. CFTs seek to ensure child safety and build on the strengths of the child, youth, and family and address their needs, desires, and dreams. People invited to CFTs by the child or family can include family members (e.g., siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles), neighbors, friends, mentors, pastors, and others.

Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy reading *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your licensing social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. If you have questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit, ask your worker.

In-Service Quiz, FP v16n1

1. How long did it take Manny S. to trust Melba, his foster mother? According to Manny, what helped him develop that trust?
2. What post-adoption supports are available to families who adopt children from foster care in North Carolina?
3. David Pitonyak offers suggestions for parents whose children sometimes engage in difficult behaviors. Which of these do you find most valuable, and why?
4. Donna Foster believes shared parenting can help reduce negative behaviors of children in foster care and their birth parents. How does Donna think this works?
5. Describe three practical strategies for ensuring the safety of children who have been sexually abused.
6. Which of the messages shared by Cindy Meyers and Robin Cuellar about establishing trust with children in foster care do you find most helpful, and why?
7. What can resource parents do to help children "bounce back" from traumatic events?
8. What's being done in North Carolina to address the needs of children exposed to domestic violence?
9. Name four do's and four don'ts youth in foster care should keep in mind when using social media (e.g., Facebook).
10. Describe the duties of a SaySo Regional Assistant; be sure to note whether they need one to serve your county.

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Have You Heard about NC Reach?



Our state's NC Reach program provides college funding and support services to young people adopted from North Carolina DSS foster care after the age of 12 and those who age out of the system at 18. Benefits include:

- **Funding.** NC Reach provides last dollar funding after all federal, state, and private dollars have been applied, to ensure that students can meet the cost of attendance at community colleges or four-year public schools.
- **Mentoring.** Be matched with a volunteer online mentor based on your professional, academic, and personal interests and goals.
- **Workshops.** You must attend at least one workshop every semester. Topics relate to school, work, and home life.
- **Academic Support.** Participants are coached by NC Reach staff; if they fall below a 2.0 GPA they are enrolled in a program for intensive academic support.
- **Internships.** NC Reach coaches students on finding and successfully applying for internships in their communities and across North Carolina.

Eligibility Requirements

- Applicants must have aged out of North Carolina's DSS foster care system at age 18 or have been adopted from the system after the age of 12.
- Applicants must be considered residents of North Carolina for tuition purposes.
- Applicants must attend a North Carolina state university or community college. For a list of eligible schools, visit www.northcarolina.edu.
- Participants must maintain a 2.0 GPA on a four-point scale and be making "satisfactory progress" towards a degree.

For more information or to enroll, visit www.ncreach.org.