

Self-Study Course

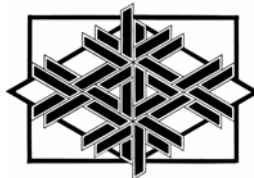
Positive Parenting for Foster Parents

August 2002

2 Hours Credit

This self-study course is based on Unit 8 of the Foster and Adoptive Parent CORE Training Self-Study Workbook used by the Alaska Center for Resource Families to train newly licensed foster parents and persons interested in adoption.

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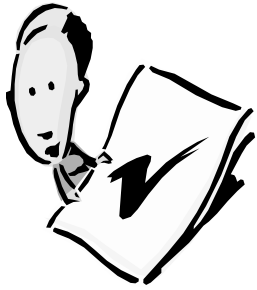
Positive Parenting For Foster Parents

Parenting and discipline often be a challenge, especially in foster families. Before we look at positive parenting strategies for foster parents, take a moment and write down how you would handle the following situations.



EXERCISE: What Would You Do If....

- 1. A six-year-old child placed in your home has terrible table manners. He eats with his fingers and eats very fast.*
- 2. A child is caught stealing money from your purse and then he lies about it.*
- 3. A child hits another child while playing because the other child won't share the truck with him.*
- 4. A child swears at you and calls you a very disrespectful name while you are trying to talk to him about doing his chores.*
- 5. A child doesn't do his homework without being reminded and then often forgets to give it to his teacher at school.*
- 6. Two kids are fighting and yelling over sharing a video game.*



CHECKLIST OF FOSTER CARE BASICS

We will return to the situations presented in the last exercise at the end of the chapter. But first, let's look at 10 "basics" in providing good, quality foster care to children. Use the questions to check out how your home rates.

BASIC #1: Take care of a child's physical needs.

Make sure a child is fed properly and gets enough sleep. Follow the schedule of checkups and immunizations recommended by your health provider. Provide children with clean clothing. Remember, a foster parent's first job is to provide a safe place for children to be and to provide for his needs.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Do we provide regular meals and healthy snacks?*
- What is our bedtime routine? Do children get to sleep at a regular time?*
- Have we taken care of immunizations and medical checkups?*

BASIC #2: Provide a Calm, Predictable Environment.

- Avoid chaos, loud radios, and yelling.
- Minimize television/computer/video game time. Too much television does not help with brain development and can isolate a child from other social interaction. Carefully choose the videos and television programs your child is exposed to.
- Clearly define a place for play and a place for homework. A child does not need his own room, but should have some private space, such as his own drawer or a place for his personal things.
- Treat your foster children like your own children. Give them the same responsibilities and privileges and let them participate in all family activities just like your other children.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Is my home generally calm and predictable?*
- Will my foster child have some space of his own?*
- Do we control the television set and videos?*
- Can I include another child in the family and treat him as my own?*

BASIC #3: Provide structure and routines.

Routines bring predictability. Predictability brings security. Establish rhythms for mornings, evenings, bedtime, homework, saying goodbye and saying hello. Have a place for things in your home such as coats, toys, clothes. When children have structure, they feel more secure because they know what to expect. It is easier for them to relax and know what to do. These routines should fit the age of the child.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *What are the ages of children in your home? What routines do they need?*
- ❑ *What would be appropriate chores for the children in our home?*
- ❑ *What is our goodbye and hello routine? How do we celebrate when good things happen?*
- ❑ *Do we have good supervision of children? Do we know where children are at all times?*
- ❑ *How about babysitters and emergency caregivers? Are the children familiar with these people?*

BASIC #4: Use your language positively. Be a good role model.

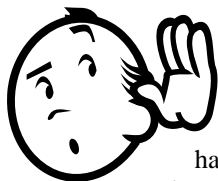
Be a positive parent. Notice when a child does something good. Point out his strengths. Take the time to teach him basic skills and manners. Let a child overhear you talking to another person about how well he is doing. Give choices to children so they feel some control. Most importantly, treat the child the way that you want him to treat other—with respect and kindness.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *Do I sprinkle lots of positive comments in my words?*
- ❑ *Where can I give a child choices? Clothes? Food? Activities?*
- ❑ *Do I provide a good role model to my children? Do I act in a way that I want my children to act?*
- ❑ *Do I take time to teach children basic skills like manners, hygiene, and getting along with others?*

PHRASES THAT KIDS (AND ADULTS!) LIKE TO HEAR

Wow! * Way to go * Super * You're Special * Good Thinking * Now you've got it! * You've worked hard * That's a neat way to look at it * You thought about that carefully, didn't you? * What do you think? * Do you see it the same way? * I love you. * Hip, hip hooray! * Terrific! * Now you're cooking! * I like that. * Good job. * You did it when asked once. * Good listening! * That was very thoughtful of you, thanks. * That was a nice thing you said. * Looking good! * You taught me something new * Thanks for sharing * You are getting really good at that. * I see you working so hard to do it right * You stick to it—that's called determination! * I never thought about it that way. * Nice try. * That's being a good friend. * Awesome. * We like having you here in our house. * What would you like to do? * You've got a lot to offer * There's no one in the world just like you*



BASIC #5: Do fun things as a family.

Having fun together as a family helps a child attach to your family. It also builds self-esteem in children. Fun things might include playing games together, going out to dinner, going to the park or playing sports, taking a child fishing, teaching a child, or how to sew. Holidays and family traditions can also help a child feel part of the family. Show affection through touch, nicknames, and laughter. Take pictures and look at them often. Or keep a scrapbook of memories to send with the child when he leaves your home.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *How do we have fun as a family? Do we regularly schedule family events, get-togethers, and outings?*
- ❑ *Do I have a scrapbook or box for a child's mementos?*
- ❑ *How comfortable am I with touch? What is appropriate for this child?*
- ❑ *How do we celebrate holidays? Is there a special role I can give my foster child in order to include him?*

BASIC #6: Find out your child's special needs and educate yourself.

Many of the children who come into foster care have experienced trauma and abuse in their lives. Some children have developmental delays or learning disabilities. Others have mental health issues such as depression or attachment problems. It is important that foster parents learn the special needs of the children in their care and learn everything they can. For example, children with Fetal Alcohol Effects often do better with a more structured environment rather than a parent who talks too much or uses time out. The more you know, the more success you will feel as a parent. And your child will do better, too!

You can find out more about your child's condition in a number of ways:

- Ask your social worker about any information he or she might have.
- If you are working with a mental health counselor, ask the counselor for some information that might help you as a parent.
- Contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families and ask about their lending library.
- Go on the Internet or visit your local library.
- Talk to another foster parent who may have experience with a similar child.
- Watch and observe how your child learns and behaves. Often children will let us know what they need if we pay attention.

BASIC #7: Establish house rules.

Establish rules that will help children stay safe and do well in your home. Teach children skills to be successful. Many children need an adult to take the time to talk with them and teach them. Be patient as children struggle to learn. If you care for older children, you may wish to write these rules down and go over them with your teen. Older children may want to give some input into the rules as well.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *What are our basic house rules?*
- ❑ *How do we communicate these to our children? Would it help to post some of the rules or write them down?*
- ❑ *Are they fair? Do they keep everyone safe?*
- ❑ *Do I take the time to teach children what they need to know?*

SAMPLE OF SOME COMMON HOUSE RULES

- It is not okay hurt yourself, hurt others or damage property.
- Take a bath or shower at least every other day. Hang up your towel and washcloth after bathing and take dirty clothes to the hamper.
- Everyone gets a daily chore. This chore must be completed before dinnertime.
- One person in the bathroom at a time.
- When leaving your bedroom or bathroom, everyone should wear clothes, a robe or their pajamas. No walking around in underwear.
- Always let an adult in the house know where you are going. Get permission before leaving the house.
- No borrowing or wearing other people's clothes or using another person's personal items without getting permission from a parent first.
- Phone calls need to be made and received before 9 p.m. at night. Phone calls should be no longer than 10 minutes unless approved by a parent.

BASIC #8: When things get stressful, call a time-out.

Know when to give yourself a “time-out.” When things are out of control, someone can get hurt. As a foster parent, you need to keep a handle of what is happening, and keep things from blowing up. By yelling back or calling names, a foster parent actually makes things worse. The situation won’t go away. But getting calm allows you to think more carefully about how to deal with a situation. If a child won’t go into time out to calm down, you be the one to leave the room. Take a deep breath, get some fresh air, close the door, Get a glass of water. Do anything that will help you calm down.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *How do I get angry as a foster parent?*
- ❑ *How do I take physically and emotionally take care of myself?*
- ❑ *How do I want children to handle their anger in my house? How will I teach that?*
- ❑ *Do I have the skills to “de-escalate” a situation or calm things down?*

BASIC #9: Use consequences when rules are broken.

The best consequences are somehow connected to what the child did. If he misses a curfew or misuses a privilege, he is docked time on his curfew the next weekend or loses the privilege for a specific time. If a child hits, he needs to be separated from others to calm down and join back in when he can play more gently. Teach children to problem solve when they are having trouble. This gives them a skill that lasts a lifetime.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ *What do we use as consequences in our family? Are they logical? Are they connected to the misbehavior?*
- ❑ *Do I take time to teach my children what I want them to do? Is my discipline positive? Does it promote skills in children or merely punish them?*

IDEAS FOR CONSEQUENCES

Make it Right! Clean it up. Replace it. Fix it. Say “I’m sorry.” Do something special for the person you hurt. Community work service. Return it.

Add something extra for the child to do Extra work chores. Earn money to replace something. Help parent with a project. Do something special for someone in the community.

Come up with a plan to do better next time. Talk about what happened. Problem solve different things to do. Write about what you did and why you need to do it differently. Spend some time reading and learning about why it’s wrong.

Loss of Privileges. Loss of phone time, video or television time. Grounding. Loss of having friends over. Earlier curfew. Miss out on events. Lose right to use car, stereo, computer.

Positive Consequences for things done well. Extra TV time. Get to choose a video. Don’t have to do a chore. Special outing with parent. Extra story time. Get to stay up late. A pat on the back.

BASIC #10: Know what the foster care regulations say about discipline and parenting.

Foster parents need to know what is expected of them. Some discipline strategies are not allowed in foster care. The following is quoted from the foster care regulations and lists what is not allowed in foster care.

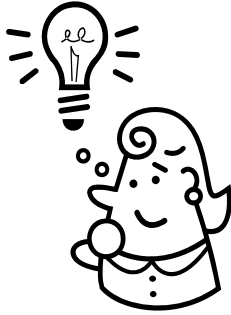


No discipline or behavior management technique may be used that is cruel, humiliating or otherwise damaging to the child.

A child in care may not be:

- (1) removed from the other children for more than 10 minutes if a young child;
- (2) disciplined in association with food or rest;
- (3) punished for bedwetting or actions in regard to toileting or toilet training;
- (4) subjected to discipline administered by another child;
- (5) deprived of family contacts, mail, clothing, medical care, therapeutic activities designated in the child's plan of care, or contact with the child's placement worker or legal representative;
- (6) subjected to verbal abuse, to derogatory remarks about the child or members of the child's family or to threats to expel the child from the foster home;
- (7) placed in a locked room;
- (8) physically restrained, except when necessary to protect a young child from accident, protect persons on the premises from physical injury, or protect property from serious damage and then only passive physical restraint may be used; or
- (9) mechanically restrained, except for protectiveness such as seatbelts;
- (10) chemically restrained, expect on the order of a physician.

No form of corporal punishment may be used on children in care. This includes no slapping, hitting, spanking, grabbing by the arm or hair, hitting the head, washing mouth out with soap, shaking, or any form of punishment that brings physical pain to a child.



EXERCISE: What Would You Do If....

Remember the situations from the beginning of the unit? Let's go back to them and apply what we've learned in this unit.

- 1. A six-year-old child placed in your home has terrible table manners. He eats with his fingers and eats very fast.***

Take the time to teach the child manners, how to use utensils and meal expectations. Make sure everyone is using the same manners to model what you want. Praise the child when he remembers to use his manners. Make mealtime pleasant, and take the time to talk about the day at dinner time. Don't punish the child by taking away food. Be patient while the child is learning new skills.

- 2. A child is caught stealing money from your purse and then lies about it.***

There are two issues here: the stealing and the lying. Give a consequence of earning the amount that the child stole from the purse. Have the child choose a charity or family to donate it to. Add an extra consequence for lying about the incident. Look for times when the child is helpful and honest and praise that behavior. Talk about why being honest is important. Give the child a chance to earn his own money honestly.

- 3. A child hits another child while playing because the other child won't share the truck with him.***

Give child time out to calm down, and then talk to him about the rule of not hurting anyone in the house. Practice with him a way to ask to play with the toy or problem solve other things he can do (choose a different toy, figure out a game where they can both play with the toy). Post the rule of not hurting yourself, hurting others or damaging property where children can see as a reminder.

- 4. A child swears at you and calls you a very disrespectful name while you are trying to talk to him about doing his chores.***

Establish a house rule about name calling and swearing and establish a consequence. When the situation described above happens, keep focused on the issues of chores. When child is calmer, talk to him about swearing at you and deliver a consequence such as he needs to help you with a chore or loss of some TV time. Practice with child what he can do when he gets angry with you instead of swearing. Make sure that you are not using cussing and swearing. Show the child what you want him to do by modeling the behavior when you get angry.

5. *A child doesn't do his homework without being reminded and then often forgets to give it to his teacher at school.*

Set up a specific place for the child to do his homework and set up a special time for him to do it every night. Give child a special folder to put his homework and have him show it to you when its finished before he gets to watch TV or play with friends. Provide some positive reward if he is able to get it in every day of the week.

6. *Two kids are fighting and yelling over sharing a video game*

Calm the children down by separating them or removing the video game. When they are calm, talk to them about learning to solve their problems without yelling. As a consequence, take the video game away for one hour. Have the children come up with some other ideas to solve the problem (use a timer, ask to use the game, flip a quarter, choose a game that allows two people to play.) Watch for a time that the children play peacefully together and praise them for working so well together.