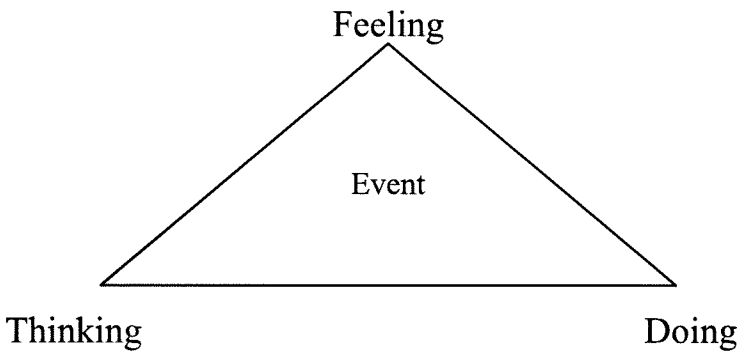
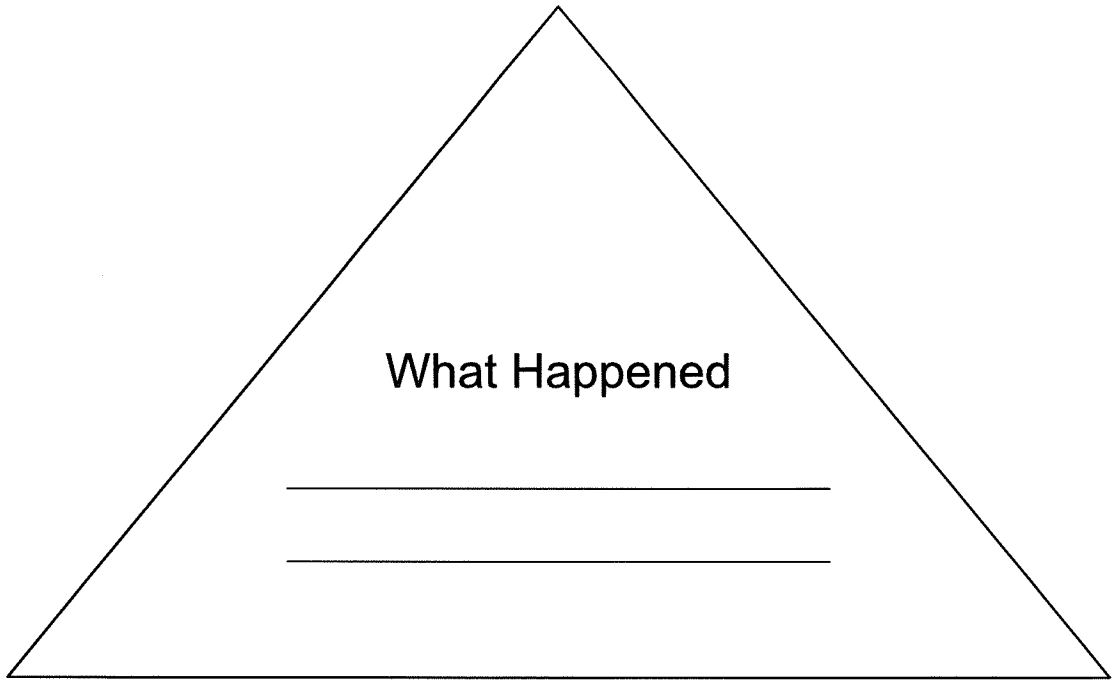
Cognitive Triangle Worksheet



EVENT	THOUGHTS	FEELINGS	BEHAVIORS
"Something Happens"	"I tell myself something"	"I feel something"	"I do something"

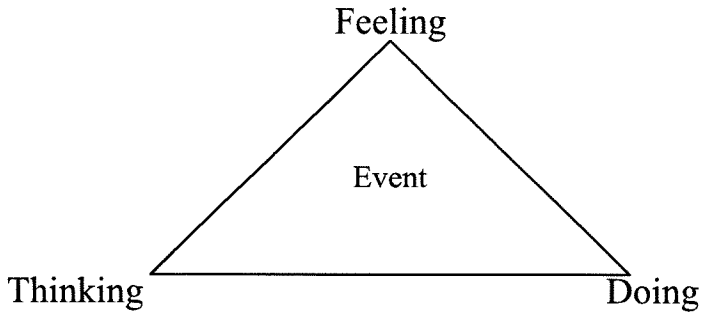
Feeling



Thinking

Doing

Cognitive Triangle: Challenging Your Thinking Mistakes



EVENT	THOUGHTS	FEELINGS	BEHAVIORS
"Something Happens"	"I tell myself something"	"I feel something"	"I do something"

Are my thoughts accurate?_____

Are my thoughts helpful?_____

Am I falling into a Thinking Mistake trap*? (If so, which one)_____

What could I say to myself that would be more accurate, positive, or helpful?_____

How would I feel if I told myself this?_____

*Thinking Mistakes Worksheet (e.g., Herbert (2005), *Thinking Mistakes Form*, Drexel University, Philadelphia.

Resource Families Should Actively Promote Social-Emotional Competence in the Children They Care For

For children who live in out-of-home care, a healing family should promote competence in managing behavior and regulating emotions. Here are six ways to start:

1. Create an environment in which children feel safe to express their emotions. Help them learn to put their feelings into words. (Examples: "You can tell me that you're mad. You won't get in trouble." "It looks like you might be sad and maybe a little afraid. Is that what is going on right now?")

2. Be emotionally responsive to children and model empathy. Reach out, connect, be affectionate and model healthy emotions. (Examples: "Sometimes when I am sad, I want to cry and it helps to have a hug. Do you want a hug right now?)

3. Set clear expectations and limits. (Examples: "People in our family don't hurt each other.")

4. Help children separate emotions from actions. (Examples: "It's okay to be angry, but we don't hit someone when we are angry." "You got some big feelings going on. Let's deal with them in a way where everyone stays safe.")

5. Encourage and reinforce social skills such as greeting others, saying please, and taking turns.

6. Create opportunities for children to solve problems. (Example: "What do you think you should do if another child calls you a bad name?")

Based on the "Social-Emotional Competence of Children" Handout From Center for the Study of Social Policies Strengthening Families: A Protective Factors Framework cssp.org

Social-Emotional Competence includes:

Self Esteem—Good feelings about oneself

Self Confidence—Being open to new challenges and willing to explore new environments

Self Efficacy—Believing that one is capable of performing an action

Self-Regulation/Self Control—Following rules, controlling impulses, acting appropriately based on the context

Personal Agency—Planning and carrying out purposeful actions

Executive functions—Staying focused on a task and avoiding distractions

Patience- Learning to wait

Persistence- Willingness to try again when first attempts are not successful

Conflict Resolution—Resolving disagreements in a peaceful way

Communication Skills—Understanding and expressing a range of positive and negative emotions

Empathy- Understanding and responding to the emotions and rights of others

Social Skills- Making friends and getting along with others

Morality—Learning a sense of right and wrongs

Developing Your Advocacy Skills

Advocacy and Being Part of a Team

Resource parents of children who have experienced trauma need finely tuned advocacy skills in order to ensure that their children receive all the services and opportunities they need to heal and thrive.

As you travel along on this journey, you may find that there will be social workers, other resource parents and support groups, lawyers, teachers, doctors, and others who can help in your advocacy efforts on behalf of your child. But no one will remain as committed or involved as you over the long haul. You have the potential to be your child's primary and best advocate.

To be an effective advocate, you must become informed. You must be assertive. You must be organized and keep accurate records. You will need to develop a sense of self-confidence and believe that you are on par with the "experts" with whom you interact.

The Self-Advocacy Cycle

Tony Apolloni of the California Institute on Human Services has identified a four-stage model that he calls the "self-advocacy cycle" for effective advocacy efforts:

1. *Targeting:* The process of identifying needs and the service agencies responsible to address these needs
2. *Preparing:* The process of getting ready to participate with service professionals in making decisions for helping your child
3. *Influencing:* The process of influencing decision makers within service agencies to adopt the desired approaches for addressing your child's needs
4. *Follow Up:* The process of checking to be certain that the agreements with service professionals are carried out. The following pages offer guidelines and tips to help you in each of these four advocacy stages as you parent a child who has experienced trauma.

Stage 1. Targeting

This step has two parts: (1) identifying your—or your child's—needs, and (2) identifying the service agencies available to address this need.

Identify the Need

Start by identifying your—or your child's—basic need. For example: "I want to ensure that my child's mental health provider (therapist) is trauma-informed." Then consider everything that can have an impact on fulfilling that need, such as:

- The only health insurance my child will have is Medicaid.
- The therapists that my former foster children worked with did not seem to be particularly trauma-informed, and the social service agency seems to only make referrals to that particular provider.

Identify Service Agencies

Identify the providers in your area that you think are the best options for your child. For help in finding a provider, talk to parents in a resource parent group about their experiences and recommendations. Research as much as you can about trauma-informed services using the Web site and other materials provided the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (http://www.nctsnet.org/nctsn-assets/pdfs/tips_for_finding_help.pdf).

Stage 2. Preparation

Once you have identified several options, it's time to do more digging. Don't rule out any option until you've looked at it closely. Check out as many options as you can and compare the results thoroughly before making a decision. Some steps to take include:

- Gather brochures from various providers.
- Attend information nights or orientation sessions.
- Attend classes, workshops, open houses or other public awareness events.
- Ask each provider if you can talk to one or more of their clients.

Be sure to ask lots of questions. Important questions to ask may include:

- Who are the staff? Are they well trained? What is their experience with children and trauma, children in foster care? Do they seem enthusiastic and committed to their work?
- What are their timeframes for service? Do you use waiting lists or other means of determining when you will receive services?
- What costs and fees are involved? Will you accept Medicaid? Have you had other foster children as clients, and what forms of payment were they able to negotiate with the agency (if they don't accept Medicaid)?
- What is their overall philosophy about child abuse, neglect, trauma, and foster care?
- How do they feel about older parents, single parents, or any other "descriptor" of your family?
- How do they view resource parents' role in the therapeutic process?
- What if you are not satisfied? What grievance procedures do they have in place?
- How willing and experienced are they at working with other agencies or providers such as the child's school?

- Are they comfortable working with both the child's biological family and resource family?

Know your rights: Every state has advocacy offices, legal aid services, offices for the protection of rights for the handicapped, etc. Use these services and learn your rights as a citizen and a client; then, you will not be intimidated by eligibility requirements at agencies.

Being part of a larger group can be quite an asset during the preparation stage. Other parents can provide you with a wealth of information, listening ears, valuable contacts, and advocacy clout when needed. Don't wait until you are in a crisis or a state of desperation—establish your connection to the group before you need help. Consider the following:

- Local resource parent support groups (if there isn't one, consider starting one)
- Specialized groups for parents of children with special needs, such as United Cerebral Palsy or the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC)

Stage 3. Influencing

It's important to develop a partnerships with service agencies or mental health workers in order to effectively work together to help your child. You will be most successful in your efforts if you view yourself as a partner with the professionals with whom you work. Steps you take early in the process to develop this partnership will pay off later. Once you have selected or been referred to providers you will interact with, do the following:

Build a relationship

- Don't only be the person who calls with a problem. Try to attend social gatherings, fund raising events, open houses, etc.
- Become a volunteer.
- Always be clear and pleasant when speaking about your needs.
- Learn names, especially the names of the receptionist and others with whom you will need frequent interactions.
- Stay in contact with all providers at least once a month, and more often when circumstances warrant.

Handle yourself like a professional

- Begin every interaction with either a positive statement or an empathy statement, such as: "I understand you have a large caseload . . ." or "The information in the packet you sent was so helpful . . ."
- Describe the problem using an "I" statement, not a "you" statement: "I am concerned about the length of time it is taking to get the initial assessment completed," rather than "You are taking too long to get me the information I asked for."
- Ask for acknowledgment and clarification: "Do I have all the information straight? Is there more I need to know?"

- Maintain an even voice tone, eye contact, and non-offensive body language.
- Offer options and possible solutions: "If scheduling is an issue, would it help if I came to your office instead?"
- Plan a time to follow up: "Can I call next Thursday to see where we stand?"
- Always thank them for their time and end on a positive note.

Be accessible

Most social workers, social service, and mental health agencies are operating on limited resources and are stretched very thin. The more accessible you are, the better service you will get.

- Leave daytime phone numbers and alternatives (cell, etc.).
- Attend all scheduled meetings and appointments, be on time.
- If you must miss an appointment, call in advance.
- Be flexible with your time; be willing to take an afternoon off from work, or be willing to travel outside of your community.

Be organized

- Write everything down, take good notes, and keep them with you.
- Keep copies of anything you mail or turn in.
- Make sure information you provide is legible and clean.
- Keep a log of all contacts including date and time, nature of contact (i.e., phone call, scheduled meeting, unplanned visit), names and titles of all involved, and any promises made.
- Follow up every verbal contact in writing; send a letter summarizing your phone conversation or the results of a meeting.
- When speaking to someone who does not have an answer for you, plan a specific time to call back to get the answer; do not wait to be called back.

Stage 4. Follow Up

Being an advocate is an ongoing process. Once you have identified an agency and established a partnership with the people working with your child, be sure to stay in frequent contact. If problems arise, be proactive in dealing with them.

- Increase the frequency of your communications.
- Draw upon the support of resource parent groups, the state foster parent association representative, and/or child advocacy organizations.

- Avoid "us" versus "them" conflicts; try to maintain the role of a partner because you are jointly working to solve a problem.
- Move up the ladder one step at a time. If you have a problem with a caseworker that you are unable to resolve, go to that person's supervisor next—not all the way to the head of the agency.
- Use the formal grievance procedures available to you within the agency.

Once you have exhausted internal mechanisms, consider going to the power brokers in your state, such as legislators and the governor's office. Get ideas, guidance, and support on these steps from more experienced members of your parent support group.

As an advocate, there will be times when you will operate alone, advocating for specific services for your child. At other times your efforts will accomplish more and be more effective if you work with others by participating in resource parent groups and/or advocacy organizations. As you go through this process, be sure to celebrate your victories and let others know about what you have learned—share your knowledge.

There will be times when you will advocate for a service to be provided that already exists and to which you are clearly entitled. Other times, you will be advocating for (and even demanding) that a system (such as the social service system) create a service or program that does not currently exist in your community.

At times, you will work to see that existing laws and regulations are followed and your rights are being honored. At others times, you may band together with others and work to change laws or create new laws. Sometimes the changes involve budgets rather than laws.

At all times and in all situations, keep your goals clearly in mind. Continue to ask lots of questions, and never settle for answers that you do not understand or that are too vague to be helpful. Finally, remember these two important facts:

Advocacy is hard work—you can't give up and you can't sit back hoping others will do it for you.

There is always hope.

Adapted from: National Adoption Exchange. (1998/1999). Becoming your own adoption advocate: A guide for families. *Families Across Michigan*. December/January. Available at http://www.mare.org/FAM/Archives/1998/D98J99.html

Other Parenting Strategies

HANDOUT 3-4

TEACHING AND PREVENTION TECHNIQUES:

Teach a child what you want him to do and set up your home so that problems won't happen in the first place!

Establish some simple house rules that keep everyone safe and protected. Talk to children about their behavior. Give them specific information about what you expect. Give praise and let your children know how you feel when they do well. Remind them of rules and calmly talk about problems. Make the rule clear and repeat it often.

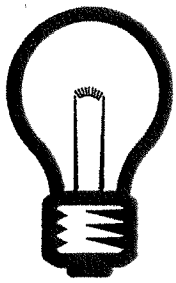
Routines bring predictability and predictability brings security. Establish rhythms for mornings, evenings, bedtime homework, visits, saying goodbye and hello, have a place for things in your home such as coats, toys, clothes. Give simple chores to everyone (use a job chart or a posted list) and remember to mix work and play.

Pre-teach or talk to children about how to act in certain situations and practice ahead of time. Or set the situation act so you give your child a chance to practice a skill and then provide praise. (EXAMPLE: *Okay Bobby we talked about the rules about going to the grocery store together and about accepting "no" as an answer if I say you cannot have candy at the checkout stand. Let's practice. You ask me if you can have some candy, and I'm going to say no."*

Have regular family meetings to talk about the upcoming weeks, have a family activity, talk about problems that happened during the week, negotiate new rules and privileges and to acknowledge good things that happen during the week is a great way to help children learn to solve problems, negotiate and communicate. Give each child a chance to chair the meeting if old enough.

Model the behavior you want to see. Remember, children imitate the adults around them. Set an example by the way you act.

OTHER IDEAS TO USE TEACHING AND PREVENTION TECHNIQUES:



- ✓ Write important rules down. Post rules.
- ✓ Show children how to do a task and let them practice under your supervision.
- ✓ Use structure and routines. (Morning routines, bedtimes, after school)
- ✓ Use visual reminders (notes, pictures, charts, posting rules)
- ✓ Remind children of expectations before events. (Pre-teaching)
- ✓ Role-play how to handle situations such as when you get angry, upset, hurt.
- ✓ Adjust your expectations for emotionally immature and delayed children.
- ✓ Re-direct or intervene. (Good for young children, but works with older too.)
- ✓ Model- your actions speak louder than words.
- ✓ Talk to the child. (Not lecture.) Focus on results of his behavior. "What you did was not okay." Not "you're a bad boy!"

Other Parenting Strategies

HANDOUT 3-4

REWARD OR POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TECHNIQUES

Respond positively to when a child acts the way you want him to so he'll do it again!

Use Rewards: Rewards are positive consequences for behaving in a desirable way. When trying to think of rewards for children, think of what is experienced as rewarding by a child. This does not have to be material, but can be other things. Some examples are: A child can receive rewards even if he can't do a behavior perfectly. If a child makes an attempt, or a small improvement, reward the attempt.

Choosing a favorite meal
Dinner out
Inviting friends over to play
Extra bed time
Special sleep out in the living room
Time with a favorite adult
Praise
Play a computer game
Stickers or Reward Chart
Coloring books
Playing a game with a parent
Trip to the library
Invite a friend to dinner

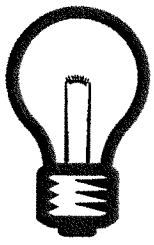
Use approval and praise to your advantage. Notice when a child does something good. Point out his strengths. Use "prompts" or set a child up to succeed. Let a child overhear you talking to another person about how well he is doing. Give choices to children so they feel some control. Help a child feel good for a job well done.

> **EXAMPLE:** *You did the right thing when you told your sister you were angry but didn't hit her. I'm proud of you for remembering the right way to act.*

Try Behavior Modification. This can be as simple as listing out a few chores that a young child needs to do every day and checking it off before she goes to sleep or before she goes out to play. It can also be a more involved system of earning points that can be traded in for privileges such as phone, curfew, bedtime or friends. State your goal positive such as "Each school night I get to bed on time, I earn an extra fifteen minutes of bedtime on Saturday night." Keep the times short (the same day for a young child, the same week or two for an older child.)

For young children or children with developmental delays, use something visual such as stars on a chart, poker chips in a bowl or quarters in a jar. Sometimes rewards work better in reverse—a child starts out with five dollars in a jar and is fined 50 cents each time he breaks a clearly defined rule (such as no swearing, or doing the dishes within an hour that dinner is ended.)

OTHER IDEAS TO HELP REINFORCE AND REWARD GOOD BEHAVIORS:



- ✓ Write important rules down. Post rules. Use visual reminders (notes, pictures, charts, posting rules)
- ✓ Use job cards (list the basic steps of a chore on a card.)
- ✓ Use charts or check off lists. Use pictures or photos for young or disabled children.
- ✓ Remind children of expectations before events. (Pre-teaching)
- ✓ Adjust your expectations for emotionally immature and delayed children.
- ✓ Behavior modification (Earning points, privileges, special activities.)

Other Parenting Strategies

HANDOUT 3-4

CONSEQUENCES

Teach children that their actions have consequences, both negative and positive.

Consequences teach children that they need to accept how their actions affect others. Help children learn to take responsibility for what they do. Natural consequences are great teachers. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you don't wear your mittens, you have cold hands by the time you get to school.*

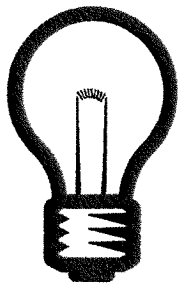
Logical consequences mean you use a result that is directly connected to the child's actions. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you do not take care of your bike or toys, you lose the privilege to play with them.* Pick consequences carefully. Remember — you need to live with it, too!

Let children experience earning or losing privileges. It is important that children know the difference between rights and privileges. Rights are things that are guaranteed like the right to be physically safe, to be fed, to be able to visit families according to the court plan, etc. Privileges are benefits that are granted to people. For children, these benefits are phone privileges, watching television, going to special events, having friends over, etc. It is important that we do many things for our children without them having to earn them (such as spend time with them, come to events, etc.) because that is how we build positive relationships. But, privileges can be earned by a child by appropriate behavior and privileges can be taken away as a result of inappropriate behavior. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *30 minutes of phone time is granted after homework is finished and the dishes are washed. Coming in 30 minutes late after curfew results in a 1 hour loss of curfew for the next two nights.*

Call a time-out. Time-outs help children (and parents) get back in control. Time-outs should give either parents or children a time to cool-off and calm down. Keep a time-out brief. It should be no longer than 10 minutes for young children because young children have a sense of time that is much longer than adults do. Generally a time-out should last one minute for each year of the child's age. Come back together and talk about what happened and how to deal with it next time.

OTHER IDEAS OF HOW TO USE CONSEQUENCES:

- ✓ Making amends. (If you break it, clean it up. If you stole it, return or replace and apologize.)
- ✓ Losing privileges. (Not rights.) Losing time on curfew.
- ✓ Repeat the task until you get it right.
- ✓ For older kids, writing down: what you did, what happened, what you should have done and what you will do differently next time then discussing this with a child.
- ✓ Focus first on safety. Separate children, stop action, protect child from hurt. Let the tantrum wind down. Then focus on behavior.
- ✓ The *1-2-3 Magic!* Technique. (Using counting and timing out.)
- ✓ Use corrective teaching. (Explaining what the expectation is and having the child practice with you along with a consequence for the behavior.)



DE-ESCALATING ANGRY SITUATIONS

1. **Lower your voice.** Talk slower. Listen. Be gentle. Think before you talk. Slow the pace down. Signal for another person to help you. STAY CALM!

2. **Back Away.** Don't move into someone's space if they are agitated. (Though sometimes, younger children welcome an adult's presence to help them keep in control.)

3. **Take a Break.** Take a two-minute time out. Tell the child you want to talk about this, but you want to think about it. Count to ten. Put your hands in your pocket. Sit down. Leave the situation for a while. Signal to a co-worker to provide support.

4. **Don't take what the child says personally.** When a child calls you a name or says he doesn't like you or says you are mean, don't take it personally. This is a child who hasn't learned how to deal with frustration or anger so he strikes out.

5. **Avoid getting into a power struggle** whenever possible. Instead of forcing a child to do something, offer a choice or a consequence. Anticipate problems (such as bed time) and try to find ways to give children choices while doing what they have to do.

6. **Don't escalate problems by calling a child names,** by making sarcastic remarks or making fun of a child.

7. **Be supportive.** Don't attack - be curious. Remember, you are the adult! You do not have to defend yourself. Ask questions, and reflect feeling. "I can see you are really upset about this." "Tell me what you think should happen." "I don't understand, but I want to." It is hard for a child to fight against someone who is on his side.

8. When a child keeps trying to engage you in an argument, keep calm and **use Broken Record Approach.** That means keep yourself focused, by acknowledging you heard the child, but continue to repeat your request.

9. **When things begin to escalate, don't try to reason a child out of it.** Leave reasoning for when things have calmed down. Remember, *you don't try to teach a drowning person to swim. You wait until he is in shallow water and calmed down.* Focus on his current behavior ("You need to calm down and lower your voice. Then we can talk about this some more.")