

SELF-STUDY COURSE

Fostering the Teenager

Updated May 2023

4.0 Training Hours

This self-study course was adapted from the training curriculum Fostering the Teenager written by Carol Brice of Family Training Associates for use by the Alaska Center for Resource Families. The following sources were also used in revising this self-study:

Working With The Abused and Neglected Adolescent In A Foster Care Home
Early Childhood Studies, University of Minnesota, 1991

Working with Aggressive Youth
Boys Town, Boys Town Nebraska, The Boys Town Press, 1989.

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FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

Part One: *Development and the Effects of Foster Care*

Teenagers have a reputation for being moody, difficult and challenging. Like two-year-olds, teens are testing their independence and developing an identity outside their parents. Adolescents in foster care have the additional impact of separation, loss, and possible developmental delay. They may have a history of multiple foster placements, criminal activity, or distrust of adults. Your foster teen may seem tough, with a bad attitude the size of the state, or you may have an immature, child-like teen that is very vulnerable to the new world opening around her or him. The journey of adolescence is an important one. It is the final step before adulthood. The step into adulthood is never easy, but is especially difficult for foster teens.

What's Happening To Teens?

Teens enter an intense period of seeking identity. They seek this by pushing away from what parents believe, and experiment with newfound social, sexual and intellectual growth. Teens identify more with friends and this redefines the relationship with the family. During early adolescence (11 - 14 years), teens experience the most rapid physical growth since infancy. During mid-adolescence (15 - 17 years), intellectual competence in abstract thinking rises. Family conflict rises over issues such as rules; homework and curfews are more intense. Development of identity in teens includes:

Challenges: Things once accepted are challenged, questioned, compared, doubted, criticized and defied. New thinking skills make this possible. Challenges may show up in areas of looks, dress, religion, and ethnicity.

Self-Consciousness: Everyone around them is concerned with the same thing -- themselves! Teens are very conscious that everyone is looking at them. It is one reason the phone is so popular: intimacy at a safe distance!

Self-Centeredness: Teens get an inflated opinion of themselves and of their own importance. Nothing can happen to them. This includes pregnancy, getting stopped for speeding and drunk driving.

Decision Making: Adults base decisions on strategies, experience and rules, not as much on emotions as do teens. Teens live on want and moods and what is happening right now.

Personal Religion: Interior religion is favored over institutional religion, doctrines, and taboos. Teens need reflective time for self-questioning and discovery of a Personal God.

Idealism: Young people have a new thought process; they become very idealistic. They are VOCAL in expressing ideas, but fail to carry out logical actions.

The Four Areas of Adolescent Development

Development takes place in four major areas: physical, cognitive (intellectual), emotional, and social. Following are major characteristics of these areas of development.

PHYSICAL

Breasts develop
Voices crack
Growth of sex organs
Wet dreams
Menstrual Cycle
Sudden growth spurts
Spontaneous erections
Sleep long hours
Enormous appetite
Girls tend to develop earlier
Pubic hair
Body hair
Skin changes
Pimples
Sweat glands
Facial hair
Figure changes

EMOTIONAL

Withdrawn
Lonely
Embarrassed
Doubtful of self
Intense
Romantic about love
Search for identity
Shaky self-esteem
Mood swings
Offended easily
Anxiety about body changes
Tend to feel ugly
Ambivalence about independence
Rebellious but needy
Experience contradictory feelings
Concern about being “normal”

COGNITIVE (Intellectual)

Idealistic
See much in absolutes
New vocabulary
New interests
Greater comprehension
Analytical about people, behavior
Challenging rules
Building identity
Tests limits
Questions authority
Critical
Assertive
Curious
Awareness of careers
Finding & testing values
Discrimination
Integrating feelings & beliefs
Difficulty making decisions

SOCIAL

Dress to style of peer group
Changing roles: chores, money, responsibilities, and schoolwork
Need to be like peers
Focus on dating, identity, peers
Needs reassurance
Make-up
Outbursts
Wants fewer controls
Can take more responsibility
Argumentative
Complex friendships
Fads, clubs, cliques
Establishing sexual identity
Parties
Teen “hang outs”

When a Youth Has Been Abused

The problems of adolescents are often intensified for foster children. A healthy childhood with opportunity to gradually learn skills and to have parents as guides, gives a child a solid base for the journey through adolescence. A child from a physically or sexually abusive home does not have this base. He or she may not have learned the skills necessary to steer successfully through adolescence. Many foster teens are far behind in their emotional and social development, even though they may be on track in their physical and sexual development.

Keep in mind the both normal adolescent development as well as the effects of abuse when expanding your skills to deal with foster teens. Adolescence is a process of separation. Many teens in foster care have spent years in many different homes. Going through the separation process when you don't have a strong attachment is very scary and largely confusing.

Possible Effects on Teens from Physical and Emotional Abuse

- Youth minimizes or denies feelings; denies self-injury or harm to others. May respond to own feelings of anger, jealousy, frustration and confusion by being verbally or physically abusive.
- Youth has poor self-image; cannot ask for what she needs; fears rejection; is very lonely.
- Youth learns to relieve emotional pain through chemicals, especially if child comes from an alcoholic family.
- Birth household was usually chaotic; youth learns to be "situational." Because there are no consistent expectations, youth learns to size up the situation and act accordingly. May result in manipulative or crafty behavior.
- Youth has difficulty with relationships. May put himself or herself in vulnerable situations or seems to be unaware of safety situations, thus being at risk for being abused again.
- Youth may have difficulty with trusting and attachment in family relationships. May want attention but may act out to get it, or may be too frightened to show or receive affection. May behave jealously or passive-aggressively toward siblings.
- If love and acceptance was withheld as a punishment, a youth may fear intimacy in a family. If things get too good or someone starts to get close, child may unconsciously pull away by isolating himself, or create a crisis when no conflict exists.
- Youth may show aggression or anti-social behaviors such as stealing, lying, or destructiveness.

Possible Effects On Teens From Sexual Abuse

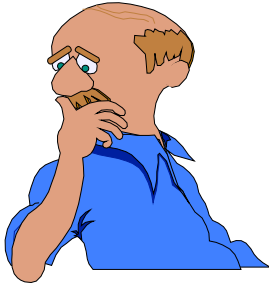
- Youth may have trouble with personal boundaries and recognizing unsafe situations. May equate love with sex and participate in early sexual activity.
- Youth may try to manipulate one caregiver against another; may act seductive toward a caregiver (part of the boundary issue).
- Youth may engage in self-mutilation or self-abusive behaviors, such as cutting on self, picking at skin, pulling out hair, or extremes in body piercing, tattooing or scarring.
- Youth may sexually act out or sexually offend younger children.
- Youth may struggle with eating disorders, obesity, or obsessive or compulsive behaviors. May be pseudo mature or look a lot older than they are.

Possible Effects On Teens From Neglect

- Youth may not have some basic hygiene skills. May be unkempt, smell bad, refuse to change clothes, or attend to basic personal washing.
- Youth may need medical or dental care that was neglected.
- Youth may be used to being on own and not used to parental rules and involvement. May defy authority or ignore curfews; not used to rules; may be skipping school.
- Early sexual experiences, or experimentation with drugs or alcohol. May be vulnerable to the attention of older teens or young adults (such as a 14 –year- old girl with a 22- year- old boyfriend.)
- Youth may have difficulty fitting into appropriate and positive peer groups, so are vulnerable to gangs, delinquent peer groups, or peers who use drugs.
- Youth may learn skills to survive that may not be acceptable in the foster home such as lying, stealing or cheating. May have difficulty with the idea that family members take care of each other and help each other out.
- Youth may show eating problems—May eat too much, hoard food, or display eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder.
- Youth may be very mature. Older teens may try to parent other child in home, especially their younger siblings.

Possible Effects On Teens From Fetal Alcohol Effects

- Youth craves belonging to a group, is very conscious that he or she is different. Tends to be accepted more by other children who feel isolated, so is at risk for running around with a bad peer group.
- Alcohol effects often make a teen prone to impulsiveness, moreso than other teens. The teen with FAE may act before thinking, take things that don't belong to them, or act out sexually or be seen as belligerent or defiant at school.
- Teens with FAE are very susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse due to earlier exposure to these chemicals. Impulsiveness and desire to belong also increases this risk.
- Many teens with FAE have some difficulty with abstraction and cognitive practices, making school more difficult as it subjects become more abstract, with more classes and higher expectations of reasoning. Teens may do well in music, arts, or other creative or concrete activities, but may struggle with science and mathematics.
- Youth may have many conflicts with parents. The teen with FAE needs controls and supervision due to his disability, but as an adolescent, he wants and demands freedom from parental control. This is a very difficult balance for parents.
- Youth has trouble with getting to sleep or waking up from sleep.
- Fetal alcohol effects affect teens very differently. If your teen has not had a thorough educational or psychological assessment, it would be important to do so now to help you plan successfully for their independent living.



Implications For Foster Parents

Why is it beneficial to learn about adolescent development and the effects of abuse on teens? If you know what is normal, and what can be expected, you can adjust your parenting and expectations accordingly. When you know how abuse or neglect can affect a child, you are in a better position to sort out what is normal adolescent development, and what may be a dysfunctional pattern the child has learned.

When fostering the teenager, keep these ideas in mind:

1. Separation, identity, and pushing away are all part of adolescence. It is important that we give teens opportunities to explore and establish their identities and interests, and give some independence in a way that will be appropriate. As foster parents, we need to make sure that teens are pushing toward something positive. We can encourage positive role models and safe avenues for skill building, such as sports, academics, hunting and outdoor skills, church activities, and helping others through service. We also need to take mood fluctuations in stride!
2. Many foster teens are struggling with establishing attachment as well as separation. They may require some counseling or other assistance to work through things that have happened to them. They may also need to attach and settle into family life before they can be successful in adolescence. Your foster teen may take longer to complete adolescence and be less mature due to his history or his disabilities.
3. As foster parents, your first goal is to provide safety and supervision. Unfortunately you can't go back and give the teen the childhood they didn't have, but you can be realistic about your opportunity to provide a safe and stable place for a youth to be. Some teens may choose not to live in your house, while other teens may choose a destructive path despite your best efforts. This does not mean you failed as a foster parent. It means the teen made a bad choice for himself.
4. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR MARRIAGE.** When you take care of yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually, you are in a better position to deal with the stressors of your job. Take a break, go on a date with your spouse, exercise regularly, pray, practice relaxation, eat well, and laugh. You can't pour positivity from an empty cup!



FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

Part Two: *Parenting The Teen In Foster Care*

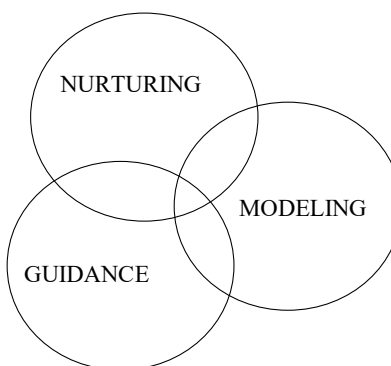
We want to parent teens in a way that will promote their self-esteem and build self-discipline. This involves three vital skills: **Nurturing**, **Modeling** and **Guidance**. While the application of these skills may vary from family to family and culture to culture, all healthy families incorporate these three elements.

NURTURING: Providing care that enables a child or teen to develop positive self-esteem, stable emotional health, and strong physical constitution.

MODELING: Exhibiting healthy behaviors whereby a child can learn via observation.

GUIDANCE (Including Discipline): Demonstrating actions that teach children what they need to know if they are to become responsible adults. Setting limits for the child's safety, and promoting the comfort of others until he is able to control his own behavior.

These work together to build up a child's sense of being loved, part of a family, and a part of a community, while also equipping them with skills to become successful adults. Children need all three for healthy development. As they get older, their needs in this area change. For example, a two-year-old may need more limits than a fifteen-year-old. But a fifteen-year-old may be more influenced by role models than a younger child. Some foster children may have serious deficiencies in these areas because of the environments they have come from. Foster care can provide recourse in all three of these experiences of nurturing, modeling, and providing guidance.



Graph #1: *The Three Parenting Skills*
Adapted From Family Training Associates, Fairbanks, Alaska

How Can A Foster Parent Provide A Nurturing Environment For A Teenager In Foster Care?

Demonstrate Affection

Guiding and encouraging teens works! Guidance encourages cooperation. Rejection encourages rebellion.

Accept the teen's personality as it is; remember he/she is unique. Let her know what you think is special about her.

Go easy on the affection, but still show you care through your words, pats on the back, quick hugs, and notes.

Build Self Respect

Avoid comparing teens with other siblings, other foster kids, and peers. Be accepting of individual differences and avoid talking negatively about her within earshot.

Show confidence in a teen's judgment by accepting decisions about clothing, friends, future plans, and use of leisure time (assuming that the teen is not hurting himself!)

Recognize Effort

Encourage effort, as well as final accomplishment. Help children see that even when they don't "win", they still learn something and get closer to their goal.

Be realistic and help teen set achievable goals. Applying too much pressure says, "You're not good enough." Feeling you are not good enough will cause the "I don't care" syndrome.

Provide Encouragement

Have positive expectations! If you expect the worst, you get it!

Give positive recognition to teen's resources and abilities. Praise when praise is due.

Encourage your teen to be positive. (*Think positive and believe in yourself!*) Positive people get things done.

Focus Upon Strengths

Turn liabilities into assets. How can that annoying trait actually be used toward some advantage? For example, being "too sensitive" can be used to empathize with others.

Accept mistakes. Use your own mistakes as opportunities to reveal your humanity. Use your teen's mistakes to encourage problem solving.

Give Responsibility

Take the attitude that the teen is a responsible person and should be treated as such.

Show appreciation for contributions at home. Ask teen for opinions and suggestions for solving home related concerns.

Encourage participation in decision making. It's only a short time until teens become emancipated and must have skills to cope with his own decisions.

How Does A Foster Parent Model The Type Of Behavior He Or She Expects From A Teen?

Values

Communicate your values in a friendly non-demanding way. Encourage conversation and discussion.

Allow teens to examine your families values and make decisions to accept or reject all or part of those values.

Help the teen consider the possible results of their decisions.

Be cautious when talking about the things your teen values. Attacking a teen's values invites rebellion.

Support Groups

Support groups can be for them or for you! Let a teen know that it's okay to need someone else to talk to.

Help teen learn about available resources.

Dealing With Change

Often changing your attitude may make the difference. Let go of some things you don't have any control over.

A focus of *changing your relationship* with the teen will be more productive than trying to change the teen.

Humor

Humor is great for establishing friendly relation with your teen. It also helps when you are able to accept mistakes (yours and theirs.)

Handling Anger

How you handle your anger will be the strongest influence on how a teen handles his/her anger. Your way may be different than what the teen has seen in his own home, so set a good example.

Be clear about acceptable limits and set up specific consequences.

Sharing Emotions

Talk about your feelings and allow teen time to talk about feelings, ideas and thoughts. This prevents the buildup of resentment that could explode into angry tantrums.

Relaxing

Take care of yourself and teach your teen to do the same; it's okay to take a break. Having fun together also builds a bond between you and the child.

Handling Stress

Model a good way to handle stress and deal with conflict. Teens expect adults to act in a certain way—and that usually means negatively! Do something different. Deal with anger and stress the way you want your teen to deal with anger and stress.

Decision Making

Encourage mutual decision making. Allowing your teen to make decisions will build independence and self-confidence.

How Does A Foster Parent Provide Guidance And Discipline To A Teen In Care?

Guidance and discipline for teens is the most challenging parenting skill for birth parents and foster parents alike. Discipline that worked in younger years (time out for example) has to be changed or eliminated. Teens need more autonomy and will demand more time on their own. That means they are responsible for what they do and say. Yet teens are also risk takers and experimenters. They face more dangers as well. For foster teens who are not used to consistent rules and limits, it will be difficult to start discipline in the adolescent years.

This section will explore ten techniques that work well with teens. Remember, guidance is just one of three important roles of parenting a teen. Be sure to include nurturing and modeling in your parenting. We strongly encourage all foster parents to complete the additional self-study **Discipline in Foster Care** for more ideas of behavior management.

10 Techniques for Parenting Teens in Foster Care

- 1. Establish Clear House Rules.**
- 2. Talk To A Teen About His Behavior.**
- 3. Hold Regular Family Councils Or House Meetings.**
- 4. Use A Contract.**
- 5. Use Corrective Teaching To Facilitate Responsible Behavior.**
- 6. Use Consequences.**
- 7. Use Point Systems To Change Ingrained Behavior.**
- 8. Use Positive Communication To Encourage Behavior.**
- 9. Teach Problem Solving.**
- 10. De-Escalate The Situation When Things Get Out Of Hand.**

GRAPH #1: Parenting Techniques For Fostering Teens

1. Establish Clear House Rules.

You need to have clear rules about what you expect family members to do. **GRAPH 2** below gives a sample of one family's house rules. This foster home gives a copy of the rules to each teen in their home. The teen reads it, asks questions, and signs it. This avoids the "You never told me!" excuse. Your rules may be different. You may have fewer or more. Rules should focus on the safety and comfort of all family members. For foster teens, it helps to have rules in writing to review individually or at family meetings.

HOUSE RULES

BEDTIME: Grade School Bedtime is 9 p.m. Junior and Senior High School Bedtime is 10 p.m. Weekend bedtime is the same unless you have permission.

TELEPHONE: Phones and texts may not be answered during conversations with adults, unless an important call is expected. No calls are allowed after 9 p.m. or during mealtimes.

MUSIC: Music is allowed between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. Please be considerate and keep the volume turned down so you don't disturb others.

HOMEWORK: Homework is to be done by 8 p.m. unless other arrangements are made with foster parents. It has to be done before any outside activities except those directly after school. Please ask for help if you need it.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL: All prescription drugs are to be handled by foster parents. Illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia, tobacco products, and alcohol are not permitted anywhere.

EATING: Snacks are limited to the snack shelf in the kitchen. Everyone is expected to join the family at mealtimes. Food is not allowed in your room unless you have permission. Please let us know what kind of food you like to eat.

CHORES: Everyone is expected to complete two chores a week. These are posted in the kitchen and are to be completed by 5 p.m. on school nights and by noon on weekends. If you don't do your job and someone else has to do it, you must pay him or her \$2 out of your allowance.

NO VIOLENCE: Physical fights, hitting, slapping, swearing or name-calling are not allowed in this house.

CLOTHING: Youth are expected to wear pajamas to bed and wear a suitable robe, sweats, or clothes when going between the bathroom and the bedroom. No running around in underwear or naked.

PRIVACY: Only one person in the bathroom at a time. If you want privacy in your room, close your door. Family members will need to knock before entering, unless it is an emergency determined by the adult. You need to respect closed doors and knock and wait for permission before entering.

SCHOOL: You are expected to be in school whenever it is in session. If you are caught skipping school or being truant, there will be consequences. The school will call the foster parent to confirm illness or appointment if you are not in school.

_____ Youth _____ Foster Parent
_____ Date

GRAPH #2: Sample House Rules

2. Talk To A Teen About His Behavior.

Because teens often act impulsively, they need to learn to think about the results of their behavior. Some teens simply continue to act out in ways they have always acted, with negative results. If you have a new child in your home, spend some time talking to him about his behavior. DON'T LECTURE. Use your best communication skills to help a child understand what he is doing and what the consequences are. Take time in your day to make yourself accessible and approachable. Use phrases like, "In this house, we try to do it this way," and "I know its confusing so I'll try to help you remember what to do."

One consequence used by a foster family with teens is a writing exercise where the teen has to write down what he did, what he intended to happen, how it affected others, and what he will do the next time. This writing is the basis of a discussion between teen and parents about appropriate actions.

3. Hold Regular Family Councils Or House Meetings.

A family meeting is a good way to promote cooperation and problem solving. Family meetings happen regularly, such as every Sunday night, and are opportunities to discuss issues that have come up during the week. It is also a good time to find out what events are coming up that week. The family decides upon meeting rules. Anything can be discussed, but no name calling or yelling should be allowed. Decisions are made by consensus. (Everyone agrees). This can be a critical opportunity for youth in foster care to feel heard and for family members to bring up concerns. It is also a good place to practice problem-solving skills. The "meeting leader" should rotate between family members. Try to include positive elements such as recognition of family members for jobs well done, or a special treat like a family video or ice cream.

4. Use A Contract.

A contract is a mutual agreement in writing between foster parents and teenager resulting from negotiation. Contracts work well with kids from age 8 years up through adolescence. It is a positive reward system which focuses on changing behavior. The contract is devised so that positive behavior has positive consequences and negative behavior has negative consequences. The contract should be concrete, specific, positive, fair and designed to be successful.

The contract should contain:

1. The date the agreement starts and ends.
2. The behaviors that are targeted for change. Be specific.
3. The reward, how often, who gives it.
4. An optional bonus.
5. The consequences for breach of contract.
6. The signature of foster parent and teen
7. Review date.

Both foster parent and teen should have a copy of the contract. Contracting makes use of many discipline techniques such as choices, problem solving, positive reinforcement and logical consequences. Since both foster parent and teen have to negotiate and agree on the contract, there is more investment in following through with what the contract says.

Graph #3 gives a sample of a blank contract that you may wish to try with your child.

CONTRACT		
Contract between _____ and _____.		
Effective dates from _____ to _____.		
We agree to the following:		

_____.		
Bonus if contract kept: _____.		
Penalty if contract not kept: _____.		
Signed: _____	_____	Date: _____
Child	Parent	
<i>This contract will be reviewed two (2) weeks from date of agreement .</i>		

GRAPH #3: Sample of a Contract Agreement

5. Use Corrective Teaching To Teach Facilitate Behavior

Many children and teens do not know how to act when they come to your home, or they are used to acting in ways not acceptable in your home. That is why house rules are so important. But teens will still show problem behavior. If you see that a child is showing a problem behavior, don't just punish a child. See it as an opportunity to teach. This is especially valuable for teens that are emotionally disturbed or have severe behavior problems. The four steps to corrective teaching include:

- Stop the problem behavior.**
- Deliver a consequence.**
- Teach an alternative behavior.**
- Practice the alternative behavior.**

Corrective teaching occurs during the last two steps. Don't just punish a child. Go the extra step and teach him how to do the chore he skipped, or how to deal with conflict with a sibling instead of hitting or name-calling. With some of our teens, we need to focus on very basic communication skills, such as how to take no for an answer, or how to ask for help. It is important to specifically describe a child's behavior when using corrective teaching for two reasons. A child needs to know exactly what he is doing that is inappropriate. Also, by describing behavior, a teen doesn't think you don't like *him* instead of not liking the *behavior*. By focusing on behavior, not personality, we can both build self-esteem in a teen while working on encouraging better behavior. Again, think of yourself as a *coach*, not a *judge*.)

6. Use Consequences.

Consequences are actions related to a child's behavior. Losing your right to use the car one weekend because you left it without gas is a logical consequence. Not having dessert for the very same reason is not logical and therefore, not as effective. Logical consequences are good teachers because they teach a child that his action has certain consequences and that he needs to be responsible for his actions. The certainty that the consequence will be enforced is more important than the severity of the consequence.

Very often, foster parents will use taking away privileges and grounding as a consequence for teens. Let's look at these two consequences.

Taking Away Privileges. Steps for taking away privileges are:

1. Should be specifically related to the behavior.
2. Should be decided upon prior to the behavior and agreed upon by parent and child.
3. Must be consistently enforced and,
4. Should have a definite starting and ending time/date.

Grounding. Grounding is usually nonspecific. It usually includes some or all of the following: If grounded, a teen MAY NOT:

- *Have friends over after school or on school nights.*
- *Go anywhere after school or out on school nights.*
- *Go out of room.*
- *Go out Friday evening or have friends over.*
- *Go anywhere on Saturday.*
- *Place or receive phone calls.*
- *Watch TV or play Nintendo.*
- *Go out of house*

Grounding grounds the parent as well as the teen because close supervision is necessary. When teens are "jailed" at home, they may retaliate with: anger toward everyone, non-participation in family life, sneaking around the rules, or breaking the rules. So if you use grounding, make it short and make it time limited.

7. Use A Point System To Change Ingrained Behavior.

Some foster homes that work exclusively with teens use a point system with their foster children. This can be especially effective for teens with difficult behavior patterns such as lying, defiance, a lack of motivation, or passive-aggressive behaviors. Point systems take commitment on the part of the foster parents, but offer incentives for specific behaviors.

There are many ways to use points systems but most systems operate on similar principles. First choose specific behaviors that you and the teen are going to work on. This may include *basic household chores* or routines (i.e. doing the dishes, cleaning your room or part of the room) or *behaviors* (i.e. using appropriate language, respecting authority, respecting property, handling conflict appropriately). State the behavior you want to see, put these behaviors on a paper chart that is visible, and assign a point value to these. When teens fulfil their daily items, they earn the points. If they don't, they either don't earn points, or they lose points for serious infractions. These points can be traded in for rewards such as a special outing or tickets. You might also award privileges such as a later curfew, or allowing friends to come over. As behavior becomes more habitual and natural, you can address other behaviors.

Don't work on too many behaviors at a time, and try to make the rewards come fairly quickly at first so teens don't get discouraged. The advantage of this system is that it gives reinforcement

to teens for good behavior, and the teens know exactly what is expected of them. The disadvantage is that the foster parent must be committed to being consistent with it.

8. Use Positive Communication To Encourage Behavior You Want.

Praise is noticing and commenting on actions that are positive. So often we focus attention on negative actions, yet fail to give the same attention to the positives. In order for praise to be effective, it should:

- Be specific: “The garage looks great. All those boxes are stacked and the garbage is ready to be picked up.” Avoid being too general: “You are a good kid.”
- Offer praise as soon as possible, not days after the action occurred.
- Make it sincere. If you are faking it, don’t say it.
- Don’t couple praise with a negative comment. For example, avoid praise such as “Hey, your room is picked up for a change!”

Don’t overdo praise. If a child does a so-so job, he doesn’t deserve a lot of attention, though if it is the first sign that he is cooperating with you, it is probably worth a matter of fact “Thanks for your help.” If a teen is doing well, mention that fact within his earshot to a social worker or a counselor. If we reinforce in a youngster’s mind that he is a capable and worthy person, he may even start to believe it!

9. Teach Problem Solving.

It is not too strong of a statement to say that the root of most problems between foster parents and teens are conflicts related to control of the teen’s life. On one hand, foster parents are frequently correct when they say, “He is not responsible or careful enough to be allowed to...” On the other hand, teens are probably correct when they say, “My foster parents treat me like I am ten years old.” It is difficult to figure out how much freedom to give to teens as they are learning responsibility and self-reliance, while at the same time, putting limits on behaviors that are potentially dangerous. *Problem solving* is a way that foster parents and teens alike can have input into a decision, or solve a conflict so that both parties feel like they have some kind of control. Problem solving is also a skill that will assist teens in learning to make good choices for themselves.

Problem solving has five steps. These steps include:

- *Decide what the problem is.*
- *Decide upon a mutually acceptable goal.*
- *Brainstorm several different ways to deal with it.*
- *Choose one and put it into practice.*
- *Check back in a specified amount of time.*

Problem solving can be used to solve a problem between two people. But it can also be used by an individual to make good choices for himself. The simple action of brainstorming solutions to various problems shows kids that there are many ways to solve problems. Considering and choosing an option that will work also gives a sense of control to a child who may be feeling very out-of-control.

10. De-Escalate The Situation When Things Get Out Of Hand.

1. First, calm yourself! Lower your voice. Breathe! Take a two-minute time out. Tell the child you want to talk about this, but you want to think about it first. Then, prevent the situation from escalating.
2. Back away. For teens that tend to be aggressive, moving into their space or putting your hand on them is seen as an attack and it may aggravate the situation. Do not touch an angry teen. He will probably strike out.
3. Be supportive. *“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 difficult for a child to fight against someone who is on his side.
4. When a child tries to engage you in an argument, use the Broken Record approach. Acknowledge you heard the child, but continue to repeat your request in a calm voice. Children and teens will often try to hook you into an argument to get you distracted from the situation at hand.
5. Help a child get back into control. *“I know it is hard to listen to criticism, but you need to sit down so we can talk about it.”* This cue for appropriate behavior is especially important for children who are impulsive and may act without thinking.
6. When things begin to escalate, slow it down. Say in a calm voice: “You know what, we are starting to have an argument. I don’t want to fight. If you want to talk this over, let’s sit down and talk. But I don’t want to argue.” **OR** “I’m too upset to talk about this right now. Let’s take a break and come back and talk about your concerns in fifteen minutes so we can both take a breather.”



FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

Part Three: *Special Areas of Concern During Adolescence for the Teen in Foster Care*

In this section we will look at four areas that foster teens often have difficulties in: *Substance Abuse, Sexuality, Depression and Suicide, and Independent Living Skills.*

Drug And Alcohol Abuse

Risk taking is a part of teen growth and development. Unfortunately, this risk-taking tendency in teens can be dangerous. Part of risk taking is the journey into doing “adult” things and looking for the *rush and high* of alcohol and drugs. “Just Say No” doesn’t work well with teens. Teens are susceptible to peer pressure, especially teens that don’t feel connected to family or peers. By saying “no”, he risks integrity versus friendship. Teens need courage and skills to resist peer pressure, and that takes a good sense of self-esteem.

Eventually, teens have to make their own choices about drugs and alcohol. Assuming responsibility for oneself is a major part of adolescence. That means making choices and accepting the known natural and logical consequences. Being open and having good communication with your child makes you approachable. Openness in communication also gives you the opportunity to have an impact. Take every opportunity to role-play with kids while watching TV, eating together at the dinner table, carpooling, etc). Introduce topics by asking, “What would you do if...” or “I read in the paper where...”

With alcohol, maintain the “no use” rule when under age. Keep your voice firm and friendly. Remember, you are a role model when it comes to the use of alcohol and drugs. Don’t allow teen parties with alcohol of any kind, and make it clear that you don’t want your teen riding or driving with people who have been drinking. Expand your awareness and make sure your rules are followed. This includes enforcing curfews and keeping informed about where your teen is and how he is getting from one place to another.

Should you search your teen’s room if you suspect drug abuse? This is a difficult question for parents. Searching should not be done routinely, any more than you would endorse police coming into your home and searching any time they suspect something is going on. Privacy is important, and you must have a serious reason to break it. A serious search for evidence also requires that you confront the teen when evidence is found, so think carefully about what you do. The earlier a problem is documented and faced, however, the easier it will be to overcome.

If your teen is using or drinking remember this: **IT IS NOT THE PARENT’S OR CAREGIVER’S FAULT THAT THE TEEN IS A “USER”. IT IS THE PARENT’S FAULT IF YOU DON’T AT LEAST TRY TO DO SOMETHING.** This means present information in a respectful but assertive manner. Back up your accusations with evidence of what you have observed or found and have treatment options ready. **PARENT’S NEED COURAGE TOO.** Parents need support. Enlist the help of your caseworker, a friend, a counselor or a support group.

Dealing With Substance Abuse In Teens

To Do:

- Don't ignore a suspected problem. Intervening early CAN help. Talking BEFORE a problem occurs is even better.
- Learn everything you can about alcohol and drugs so that you can better spot problems or indicators.
- Openly talking about our feelings about drugs or drinking and driving can be more influential than lots of rules -- especially rules you can't follow through on.
- Have clear rules in your house about smoking, drugs, and alcohol use. Follow through with consequences.

If You're Teen Is Involved:

- Get outside help if the child is not already in therapy. Talk to the caseworker or probation officer and get the child to counseling.
- Be clear on the consequences of drug abuse and have a plan that you, the social worker and the counselor agree on. The more you talk about it, the less the child can manipulate you.
- Realize no treatment will work without the teen's willingness to participate. Measure their progress realistically. Focus on the positive.
- Get some help for yourself (to cope with feelings and manage the family). Al-Anon is a program for family members of a person with an alcohol or drug addiction. They can offer great support to foster parents as well.

Adolescent Sexuality

Adolescence is a time when a teen develops sexually, both in physical and emotional ways. Adolescents are bombarded with messages about sex everyday. Advertising uses it to sell jeans and soft drinks, musicians use it to sell songs, and television uses it to gain viewers. Teens see sex in the media presented as escape or entertainment -- all without consequences. 94% of sex on television today is between people who are NOT married to each other. Sex is portrayed for recreation rather than procreation. Sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies have increased dramatically in the teenage population in the last decades, though there has been a small decrease in pregnancy in 1998. The epidemic of AIDS has not ignored teens, one of the most high-risk groups for HIV infection.

Despite the consequences, there is still peer pressure and societal pressure for teens to begin sex as a rite of passage. Teens, more than, ever need good education and guidance. Foster teens who have been victimized, or who are currently sexually active, need even more guidance. Sexuality education has two parts: the values learned at home, and the education given by experts and peers. But remember, educating a teen doesn't always change behavior.

Kids take risks with sexual activity not because they are uneducated about sexuality, but often because of their own ambivalence about their own sexuality! To use birth control effectively, you have to acknowledge that you are a sexual person and plan to have intercourse. A girl can't be "swept away" and be prepared for sex all at the same time. To complicate this all,

REALITY has no bearing in the life of a teenager. They spend a lot of time ignoring the reality of situations. “It couldn’t happen to me!” is the frequent cry of the young woman who finds herself pregnant or the young man with gonorrhea.

For many foster children, sex is equal to being loved and feeling loved. It fills an emotional need -- at least for a while. All the information in the world won’t change behavior when sex is being used as a means to feel loved and have a place to belong. Unfortunately, some teen girls welcome getting pregnant as a way to have a family of her own. So how to start?

How to talk about sexuality and values with your teen

- Give books, discuss information as thoughts or questions arise.
- Tell stories in the third person.
- Criticize TV or picture perfect magazine images.
- Use billboards, ads, and love scenes to start conversation.
- Set aside time to talk to each child individually.
- Even if they know it all, the worst that can happen is they’ll hear it twice.

What kind of information to give

- Help slow developing children understand they are normal. Provide as much information and resources as you feel comfortable with.
- Boys need to know about girls and girls need to know about boys in order to be understanding and learn respect for each other.
- Let teens know they are lovable, teach them to respect their bodies.
- They need to know how conception occurs and that unprotected intercourse could lead to pregnancy.
- They need to know about venereal disease and AIDS.
- Answer, “Don’t you trust me?” with “No matter how much we trust someone, we know everyone makes mistakes.”
- Teens that have been sexually abused may have special questions or needs. Help teens feel positive about their sexuality and emphasize they have a choice whether or not they participate in sexual activity.

How teens feel about it

- Teens who feel they can discuss sex with parents or caregivers are usually careful about their sexual activity.
- Teens who are forbidden from any sexual contact or allowed only very restricted contact often rebel completely.
- Teens are often fearful about sex; it’s new to them. They don’t know what is expected; they are concerned about pregnancy, VD, broken hearts, AIDS, and bad reputations.

Depression And Suicide

Some adolescents are at increased risk for suicide. Adolescent males in particular have an increased risk, with a severe increase of risk for young Native males, ages 16 - 24. About 75% of suicidal people will give notice of their intentions in the form of early warning signs. It is important that these warning signs be recognized and treated as a serious form of communication. Look for a cluster of clues within the context of recent loss, sadness, depression, withdrawal, loneliness, physical pain or mental anguish. A suicidal person who gives warning signs will most often present more than one clue.

Warning Signs of Depression and Possible Suicide

- * Changes in sleeping patterns.
- * Inability to concentrate.
- * Changing in eating patterns.
- * Seems withdrawn.
- * Become agitated easily.
- * Apathy (not going to classes or not socializing).
- * Crying frequently.
- * Changes in personal hygiene.
- * Feels worthless.
- * Appears to be quite sad.
- * Increased dependence on alcohol/drugs.

People often give verbal warnings prior to a suicidal attempt. Some examples of verbal warnings are:

- * "I won't be around much longer for you to worry about."
- * "What's the point of living?"
- * "I can't go on."
- * "How much aspirin can you take and still stay alive?"

People often have behaviors that indicate they might be considering suicide:

- * Giving away of possessions.
- * Writing a suicide note.
- * Acquiring the means to commit suicide (example: buying a gun or accumulating drugs, medicine)
- * Organizing business and personal matters as if one were going away for a long time.
- * Suddenly resigning from organizations such as clubs or church groups; or resigning a position in school government or quitting a team.

What to do when your child is suicidal

Prevent the Opportunity: Remove a child's access to dangerous objects that could be used to inflict self-harm.

Ask and Listen: Don't be afraid to ask if someone is contemplating suicide. Always take these threats seriously. To help you gauge the severity of the threat, ask the person if they have a plan. If it is well thought out and the child has access to the means, this is a serious threat. Often the ability to talk about it with someone who is concerned offers a release for the child. *Listen*, don't give advice. Don't challenge or call their bluff. Sometimes just being able to talk at length makes a child too tired to do anything to hurt themselves.

Persuade: Offer hope. The next step is to offer hope in the form of help. With your words, let them know you care.

“I love you and I don’t want to see you hurt yourself.”

“I can tell you’re really hurting. Tell me what you are going through so I can understand.”

“I have heard you mentioning suicide lately. I am very concerned. Are you feeling so bad that you are thinking of killing yourself?”

Refer: Contact a therapist or caseworker. If a child is in immediate danger, he may need to be hospitalized. Call 911, or take the person to a crisis center or hospital emergency room. **DO NOT LEAVE THE PERSON ALONE.**

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

All adolescents are preparing for their future as adults. But for teens in foster care, these issues often are even more important because many teens may not find an adoptive home and may emancipate from the system at 18. It may fall on you, the foster home, to prepare the child for independent living. Skills that teens need to learn include:

Cooking and housekeeping

How to Get and Keep a Job

Educational Planning

Money Management

How and When to Get Medical Care

How to Find Community Resources



**ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES
SELF-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOSTER PARENTS**

ITP Topic: Adolescent Development & Guidance

COURSE: FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

4.0 HOURS TRAINING CREDIT

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If you have questions or concerns about this self-study course, please call us on our toll-free line at 1-800-478-7307. Anchorage: 279-1799.

The following section is an evaluation of the self-study materials. Please fill it out upon completion of the questionnaire, and return this page to us with the rest of the course materials. Thank you for your time and comments. It helps us provide appropriate training to meet the needs of foster parents.

*****EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY MATERIALS*****

Please complete the following questions.

1. Did this self-study course meet with your expectations? YES NO
2. How would you rate the written presentation of information on the topic?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor
3. Did this course add to your knowledge and/or skills? YES NO
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FOSTERING THE TEENAGER**4.0 Hours**

NAME: _____ PHONE NO.: _____

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*ADDRESS: _____
Street or Post Office City/State Zip

EMAIL: _____

- YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.** *(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for resource families)*

Are you a foster parent? YES NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _____If NO, please check one: Pending Foster Parent OCS Birth Parent Adoptive Parent Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____) Agency: _____ Other *(please specify)*: _____**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. First try to answer from your understanding of the material before referring back to the self-study.

1. Teens often reject the attitudes and way of life of their parents in order to assert their independence.

- ____ a. True
____ b. False

2. Development of identity in adolescents includes; (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY).

- ____ a. Questioning one's own personal religion.
____ b. Regression to a grade school aged mentality.
____ c. Challenging once accepted beliefs.
____ d. Trying to make one's own decisions.
____ e. Inflating the sense of one's own importance.

3. Name two (2) emotional developmental characteristics of the adolescent:

- a) _____
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4. Name two (2) cognitive developmental characteristics of the adolescent:

- a) _____
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CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
PAGE 2 - FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

5. Which of the following are common behaviors of teens that have experienced physical or emotional abuse according to the listing in the self-study? (CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

- a. Learns to relieve pain through drug or alcohol abuse.
- b. Poor hygiene skills.
- c. Denies or minimizes the feelings of others.
- d. Sexual offending younger children.
- e. Aggression and anti social behaviors.
- f. All of the above.

6. Which of the following are common behaviors of teens that have experienced sexual abuse according to the listing in the self-study? (CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

- a. Impulsiveness
- b. May engage in self- mutilation behavior.
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7. Which of the following are common behaviors of teens that have experienced fetal alcohol effects according to the listing in the self-study? (CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

- a. Impulsiveness
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- f. All of the above.

8. Name two (2) house rules that are important in your home.

a. _____

b. _____

9. The best thing to do when a teen starts to get out of control is to take a deep breath and put your arms on his shoulders to calm him down.

- a. True
- b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
PAGE 3 - FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

10. For each of the following terms, define the word in your own words and give one example of how this pertains to teens.

MODELING:

Definition:

Example:

NURTURING:

Definition:

Example:

11. The Corrective Teaching technique includes four steps. Fill in the blanks to complete these four steps.

_____ *the problem behavior.*

Deliver a _____.

_____ *an alternative behavior.*

_____ *the alternative behavior.*

12. A foster parent should search a teen's room regularly to look for drugs.

- _____ a. True
_____ b. False

13. Teens often take risks with sexual activity because of their ambivalence about sexuality.

- _____ a. True
_____ b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
PAGE 4 - FOSTERING THE TEENAGER

14. Adolescent males are at increased risk for committing suicide.
_____ a. True
_____ b. False

15. USE THE FOLLOWING CASE HISTORY TO ANSWER THE QUESTION BELOW.

This is 17 year old Connie's fourth placement in foster care. She has been in your care for five months and has recently begun sleeping longer and longer hours. She constantly looks messy and unwashed though she previously was careful about her appearance. She doesn't eat at the table, she just picks at her food. When asked for her input about what she expects to do after she turns 18, she shrugs her shoulders and says, "It doesn't matter. I won't have to deal with it." You have recently discovered that she has given away her entire collection of earrings (including her favorite gold earrings) to a girl at school.

What clues in Connie's behaviors would cause you to be concerned about depressive or possible suicidal behavior?

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OR FAX TO: 907-290-8765

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