



Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## **Module 4: Building a Safe Place**



# Learning Objectives

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After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the key components of a safety message and how to deliver an effective safety message to children who have experienced trauma.
- Define trauma reminders and give an example of a trauma reminder and reaction.
- List at least three ways you can help children to cope with trauma reminders.





Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## Module 4: Building a Safe Place

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### Essential Element 2



2. Help your child to feel safe.

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### What Is Safety? (Group Activity)



**Pronunciation:** \'sāf-tē\

**Function:** Noun

From the Middle English *saufte*, from the Anglo-French *salveté*, *saufté*, from *salf* safe

**Definition:**

1) the condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury, or loss

Miriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2008). Retrieved April 27, 2008 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/safety>

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## Safety and Trauma



- Physical safety is not the same as psychological safety.
- Your child’s definition of “safety” will not be the same as yours.
- To help your child feel safe, you will need to look at the world through his or her “trauma lens.”

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## Safety and Trauma (Continued)



Children who have been through trauma may:

- Have valid fears about their own safety or the safety of loved ones
- Have difficulty trusting adults to protect them
- Be hyperaware of potential threats
- Have problems controlling their reactions to perceived threats

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*When supper was over I saw that there were many biscuits piled high upon the bread platter, an astonishing and unbelievable sight to me. . . .*

*I was afraid that somehow the biscuits might disappear during the night, while I was sleeping. I did not want to wake up in the morning, . . . feeling hungry and knowing that there was no food in the house. So, surreptitiously I took some of the biscuits from the platter and slipped them into my pocket, not to eat, but to keep as a bulwark against any possible attack of hunger. . .*

*I did not break the habit of stealing and hoarding bread until my faith that food would be forthcoming at each meal had been somewhat established.*

—Richard Wright

Wright, R. (1945). *Black boy*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

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## Promoting Safety



- Help children get familiar with the house and neighborhood.
- Give them control over some aspects of their lives.
- Set limits.
- Let them know what will happen next.
- See and appreciate them for who they are.
- Help them to maintain a sense of connection and continuity with the past.

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## Give a Safety Message



- Partner with the social worker or caseworker.
- Get down to the child's eye level.
- Promise to keep the child physically safe.
- Ask directly what the child needs to feel safe.
- Follow the child's lead.
- Let the child know that you are ready to hear what he or she needs.

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## Give a Safety Message *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



Take concerns seriously:

- Empathize.
- Acknowledge that the child's feelings make sense in light of past experiences.
- Be reassuring and realistic about what you can do.
- Be honest about what you do and don't know.
- Help your child to express his or her concerns to other members of the child welfare team.

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## Explain Rules



When explaining household rules:

- Consider the child's history.
- Don't overwhelm the child.
- Emphasize protection.
- Be flexible when you can.

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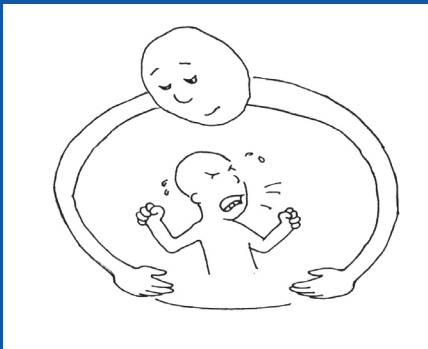
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## Be an "Emotional Container"



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*I started cursing at the foster mom. I wanted her to lose control. I figured that sooner or later she would say something that would hurt me. I wanted to hurt her first . . .*

*Later, I felt depressed. I knew I'd acted out of control. When I get angry I don't even realize what I do and I hurt the people around me. . . .*

*I feel sad that I'm not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? Represent, Nov./Dec. 2004.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/NovDec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.htm>

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## Be an “Emotional Container” (Continued)



- Be willing—and prepared—to tolerate strong emotional reactions.
- Remember the suitcase!
- Respond calmly but firmly.
- Help your child identify and label the feelings beneath the outburst.
- Reassure your child that it is okay to feel any and all emotions.

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## Manage Emotional “Hot Spots”



- Food and mealtime
- Sleep and bedtime
- Physical boundaries, privacy, personal grooming, medical care

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*I made a list of things my sister and I eat so [our new foster mother] could buy our food, but she didn't buy exactly what we wanted.*

*She bought the wrong kind of cereal, she put ginger in the juice even though I told her not to, and the bread was some damn thick . . . bread.*

*All of these little things made me furious. I believed she thought it didn't matter what I told her, and that she could treat us how she wants.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? Represent, Nov./Dec. 2004.  
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## Food and Meals (Group Activity)



- Be aware of the child's history.
- Accommodate food preferences, if possible.



- Set consistent meal times.
- Involve child in planning and making meals.
- Keep mealtimes calm and supportive.

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*I woke up in a panic. I couldn't stay asleep. [My foster mother] came into my room. "Honey, what's wrong?"*

*I couldn't even tell her how I felt. I couldn't get the words out to say what was the matter.*

—A. M.

Learning to love again. *Represent*. July/Aug 2006.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JulyAug2006/2006-07-04b.htm>

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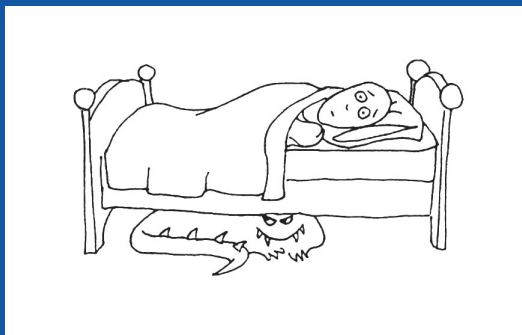
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## Sleep and Bedtime (Group Activity)



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## Sleep and Bedtime *(Continued)*



- Help your child to “own” the bedroom.
- Respect and protect your child’s privacy.
- Acknowledge and respect fears.
- Set consistent sleep and wake times with predictable, calming routines.
- Seek help if needed.

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*I don't think there was a time when I wasn't abused as a child. In order to survive the abuse, I made believe that the real me was separate from my body. That way, the abuse was happening not really to me, but just this skin I'm in.*

*Still, my body sometimes betrayed me. Crying when I wanted to remain strong, becoming tired and refusing to obey my commands to stay awake, and, most horribly, physically responding to sexual advances. It seemed to me like my body had a mind of its own. I hated the thought of sexual contact, yet my body would respond to it, even when it was unwanted.*

—C. M.

My body betrayed me. Represent. Sept./Oct. 2003. Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/SeptOct2003/FCYU-2003-09-24.htm>

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## Physical Boundaries



Children who have been neglected and abused may:

- Never have learned that their bodies should be cared for and protected
- Feel disconnected and at odds with their bodies
- See their bodies as “vessels of the negative memories and experiences they carry, a constant reminder not only of what has happened to them but of how little they are worth”

Pughe, B., & Philpot, T. (2007). *Living alongside a child's recovery*. London, UK: Kingsley Publishers.

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## Physical Boundaries *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



- Respect your child's physical boundaries.
- Make the bathroom a safe zone.
- When helping younger children bathe, ask permission before touching and be clear about what you are doing and why.

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**Let's take a break!**

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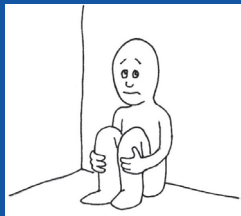
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## Trauma Reminders



People, situations, places, things, or feelings that remind children of traumatic events:

- May evoke intense and disturbing feelings tied to the original trauma
- Can lead to behaviors that seem out of place, but may have been appropriate at the time of the original traumatic event



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## Trauma Reminders' Impact



Frequent reactions to trauma reminders can:

- Keep a child in a state of emotional upset
- Be seen by others as overreacting to ordinary events
- Result in avoidance behaviors
- Isolate the child from peers and family
- Make a child feel ashamed or afraid of going "crazy"

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## Identifying Trauma Reminders



- When your child or adolescent has a reaction, make note of:
  - When
  - Where
  - What
- When possible, reduce exposure.
- Share your observations with your child's caseworker and therapist.

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## What's the Reminder? (Group Activity)



- What situation or event did the child react to?
- Based on the child's trauma history, what was it a reminder of?
- What else could serve as trauma reminders? (Try to think of at least three for each child.)

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## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Parents Can Do



- Ensure safety
- Reorient
- Reassure
- Define what's happened
- Respect and normalize the child's experience
- Differentiate past from present

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## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What NOT to Do



- Assume the child is being rebellious
- Tell the child he or she is being dramatic or "overreacting"
- Force the child to face reminder
- Express anger or impatience

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## Coping with Trauma Reminders: What Children Can Do—SOS



- **S**top
  - Stop and take several long, deep breaths.
- **O**rient
  - Look around and take in immediate surroundings.
  - Make note of physical reactions (breathing, heartbeat, etc).
- **S**eek Help
  - Use a "stress buster" to help calm down.
  - If needed, call a trusted friend or reliable adult.

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## SOS: Identifying Stress Busters



- Activities (running, playing a particular song)
- Things (a toy, a stuffed animal, a picture, a favorite blanket, a particular food)
- Places (a spot in the yard or a park, a room)
- People
- A specific thought, phrase, or prayer

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## Coping with Trauma Reminders (Group Activity)



How did the resource parents . . .

- Reorient the child and ensure safety?
- Help the child understand what happened?
- Differentiate past from present?
- Give the child new options for coping with a reminder?

Would you have done anything differently?

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*I woke up in a panic. I couldn't stay asleep. [My foster mother] came into my room. "Honey, what's wrong?"*

*I couldn't even tell her how I felt. I couldn't get the words out to say what was the matter.*

*"You're safe here, OK? If anyone tries to get through the door to hurt you I will get them."*

*I was glad that she was so aggressive—it made me feel like I could loosen up and let someone else protect me. I didn't have to worry anymore.*

—A. M.

Learning to love again. *Represent*, July/Aug 2006.  
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## Module 4: Wrap Up

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NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network



## **Module 4**

### ***Supplemental Handouts***



## A.M.'s Story

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### **Am I Too Angry to Love? My Foster Mom Kicked Me Out After Three Weeks**

This summer, ACS announced that it was closing the group home I've lived in for the past three years. I found out that my twin sister and I would have to move to a foster home.

Right before the house shut down, T. and I visited a foster mother in the Bronx. She asked us, "What do you like to eat?"

I told her, "You'll get a list if we come to live with you."

Then she asked us to have something to drink and we agreed. She gave me a ginger drink that burned my mouth. I hated it. I text-messed my sister saying, "Don't drink it," but she did anyway and got a surprise.

Then came our small room. I didn't like it.

After that, it was time to go. On the train, we told our social worker we hoped that we didn't have to live there. But a week later we moved in. I was angry, and a little fearful.

### **"They're All the Same"**

I would like foster parents who make me feel like I am a part of their lives, not an outsider or stranger, and who want me to be who I am and don't judge me on my past or file. But when I came into foster care four years ago, my sister and I lived with five different foster families in less than a year.

One sweet foster parent was Joann. Like my sister and me, Joann was sexually abused by a relative when she was young. When she told me that, I felt a little sense of assurance that she might understand how I felt about myself-dirty-because of what my father did to me. Joann never thought of me as crazy. She believed that I was angry at the world and I was.

The worst was our fifth foster home. There I was sexually abused by the foster mother's best friend. That experience still haunts me. He was so big and nasty. The foster mom ignored the abuse. I still wonder, "Where was she? Did she even care about me?" It's hard for me to imagine trusting another foster mom when my experiences make me think, "They're all the same."

### **"Someone Has to Want Us"**

It was a relief when my sister and I got placed in our group home. The group home became our own little environment with rules that we made for ourselves. We cooked for ourselves, washed our clothes, and prepared for our future on the mean streets of the world.

It felt good to be my own boss. I got to make the decisions in my life. I took the blame for anything that went wrong or that I didn't like.

But it hurt not to have anyone looking out for me. When friends would talk about fights they had with their parents, or when their parents would show up for school events, I would just sit and watch all the parents. When I heard people say, “Twins are wonderful,” I’d think to myself, “Someone out there has to want us.”

## **Treated Like Children**

When we moved in with that foster mom in the Bronx, I hoped she’d try to be there for us.

The first day she wasn’t even there. I was angry and hurt. I guess that’s because after I spoke up about the abuse and came into foster care, my mother and father wanted nothing to do with me. I began to believe that any adult who said they’d care for me would be just like them. I wanted to leave that night.

When the foster mom came home, she seemed to believe that my sister and I were little children who needed the world from her. She wanted me to call her “Mom” or “Aunt.” I have a bad relationship with my mom and my aunt. I thought, “You want me to treat you like I treat them?” Then she cooked for us and we didn’t eat what she cooked. We waited until she was done and cooked what we wanted.

I made a list of things my sister and I eat so she could buy our food, but she didn’t buy exactly what we wanted. She bought the wrong kind of cereal, she put ginger in the juice even though I told her not to, and the bread was some damn thick Jamaican bread. So we bought our own food and she got mad.

She said, “I didn’t really know what to buy.”

“Then what the hell was the list for?” I said.

“I was looking and I didn’t find what was on the list,” she said.

“Well, I found it,” I told her. She sucked her teeth and walked away.

## **No Stranger Controls Me**

All of these little things made me furious. I believed she thought it didn’t matter what I told her, and that she could treat us how she wants. I don’t want any stranger to try to take control of the life that my sister and I have built for ourselves. I’m afraid that if I give up control—even over what I eat—then I will feel like I did when my dad was sexually abusing me: like a doll in someone else’s playhouse being used for everything that person desires.

Our first weekend there, we went AWOL. My foster mother kept calling me on my cell. When we came home, she said, “I was worried.”

I said, “I do have a sister who came along with me. Why do you keep addressing all of the problems as me?”

Then she got mad.

It seemed like one minute she wanted to be my best friend and worry about me, the next she got angry, showing her dark side.

### **I Wanted to Hurt Her First**

When foster mothers switch like that, I'm reminded of my mom. One minute she was nice; then she would get so mean and hard to handle. My mother abused me even more emotionally than physically. I'm afraid a foster mom will, too.

Whenever I feel threatened I get this feeling that I want to hurt anybody who might try to harm me and my sister. So I started cursing at the foster mom. I wanted her to lose control. I figured that sooner or later she would say something that would hurt me. I wanted to hurt her first.

When my emotions came out, she got to feel the hurt from my past. When she closed the door and I called her one last name. I won and she lost. Yelling at her made me feel powerful. I knew that no matter how much she might scare me or worry me, I could still get the last word or the upper hand.

Later I felt depressed. I knew I'd acted out of control. When I get angry I don't even realize what I do and I hurt the people around me.

When I think of all the people I've hurt because of my anger I feel bad. This pattern of abuse that I've inherited from my parents is one I want to break. But I don't know how.

### **Kicked Out**

After two weeks, the foster mom told my social worker that she wanted us out. She told my sister and me that we could never be a part of her family because we don't listen.

That hurt me. I didn't want to live with her, but I didn't want her to reject me, either.

That day, I wished I could be on my own. I thought I'd feel better about myself if I didn't have anyone telling me what to do. But I also felt afraid of having no one to look over me. What if I'm not stable enough to cope out in the real world? What if my anger gets the best of me? Who will I turn to?

### **A Walking Time Bomb**

I hope that foster mother understood all of my troubles with foster homes, my past and my feelings toward myself.

I fear myself sometimes. I'm afraid that I may become like my mother—a mean b-tch who couldn't control herself.

I feel sad that I'm not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.

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## **Learning to Love Again: I Finally Found a Foster Mom I Could Trust**

The first time Yolanda saw my twin sister T. and me, we were cursing out our foster parent. Yolanda was going to be our next foster mom. Who knows what she had in her head about us? We were new to the agency, so the only things in our file were bad things: that we violated curfew, and didn't do our chores, that I smoked and that my sister liked to drink.

I believed she thought, "As soon as they act up once they're out of my home." That was the kind of attitude my sister and I had encountered at the other homes we'd been in.

### **From One Bad Home to Another**

T. and I entered care four years ago, after we told about being sexually abused by our father. The first year we lived with five different foster families.

We lived with a woman who only seemed to care about how much money she was going to get for us. Another foster mother's main concern was that we wouldn't say anything bad about her home, which was sweet on the outside but salty on the inside. Those bad experiences made me think all foster moms were the same. I couldn't imagine trusting any of them.

It was a relief when we were placed in a group home, but it hurt not to have anyone looking out for us. We ran free like little animals without an owner to watch us. Three years later ACS closed the group home and we went back to bouncing from one foster home to another.

### **She Wasn't a Fake**

At the agency a few days before we moved into her home, the only thing Yolanda said was, "There are chores and a curfew." I didn't know what to think of her, only that she was going to be my next victim. I was going to try to hurt her before she got rid of my sister and me. I thought it would be better to get kicked out for bad behavior than to have her reject us.

My sister and I walked into Yolanda's home feeling sure that within the next month or two we would be on our way out. There was no need to get all attached to the room, the bed, or even the rules.

But that first day at Yolanda's home my rabbit died. I started to cry. That rabbit was so small and defenseless. It needed me and I let it die. Then Yolanda hugged me. "If that happened to my cat Jackie I would feel the same way that you do," she said. She wanted my rabbit to be buried and offered to buy me another one. That's how I realized she wasn't a fake.

I felt different at that moment. It was like she felt the anger that I had inside of me, and was saying that it was OK to feel that way. That it was OK to be sad and for me to let my guard down, that not everyone in the world was out to harm me or my sister. That it was OK to let someone into my world and let them help me. It was just a hug, but it meant so much.

## Feeling More at Ease

As the months passed, I began to feel a little bit more at ease. But memories of my past started to rise to the surface. I started having a lot of bad dreams about my dad, and I got so confused and scared.

One day when I was feeling depressed, I told Yolanda I was feeling sad. She said, “Why do you think that you are sad?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I just do.” Then I looked at her and we just sat there and laughed. It was like we both knew that I wanted to talk but I wasn’t ready to let it all out. She didn’t push me. Instead she told me, “When you’re ready to talk, text me on my cell phone.” That was fine with me. I liked that.

When I told her about my nightmares, Yolanda stayed with me in my room and tried to comfort me. I talked to her a little, but I couldn’t get it all out so she just let me know that she was there for me.

“Any time you need me, come and knock on my door,” she said, unlike other foster moms who just called 911 to have someone come and get me. When she left I was still a little bit scared, but more at ease.

## Talking Out My Fears

Sometimes I talked to her about my dad, and how I was scared that he was going to come back and kill me, or how sometimes I could just feel him touching me, even though the abuse stopped years ago.

Sometimes I’d feel like Yolanda, T. and even our foster sisters had vanished from me, like the night devoured them and left me alone. I started staying up so that I could beat whatever might come and try to hurt my new family. I kept a knife to protect us.

Yolanda had to take that away from me. When she did, she reassured me that she would never let anything happen to my sister or me. For some reason I believed her, I guess because she didn’t seem to mind that she had to be there for me in the night. Or if she did, she had the perfect way of hiding it so that I didn’t feel like I was bothering her.

## She Was There for Me

Then, in November, my sister signed herself into a psychiatric hospital because she was feeling depressed. When I saw her at school, she was going to therapy and I was going home. That afternoon, Yolanda got a phone call from someone at the agency. T. was on her way to a hospital upstate. I couldn’t believe it.

“Your sister cut herself,” Yolanda told me.

“Is she really going to the hospital?”

“Yes, that is what I was told.”

I rushed to the phone to call my law guardian to get T. out, but I couldn't get in contact with her. It didn't occur to me until later that T. wanted to be in the hospital.

That still didn't stop me from becoming stressed out. For months, I pretty much stopped eating. Yolanda was there with me during everything.

"I know that you are stressed but you have to eat or you will get so sick," she told me.

"I miss her, I want my sister."

"I don't know why she wanted to hurt herself like that, but I guess that she needed help and she is going to get it now at the hospital," Yolanda told me. She hugged me and I just stayed like that, crying on her shoulder for a little while.

### **I Didn't Have to Worry Anymore**

A few nights after that I woke up in a panic. I couldn't stay asleep. Yolanda came into my room. "What's wrong?" I couldn't even tell her how I felt. I couldn't get the words out to say what was the matter.

"You're safe here, OK? If anyone tries to get through the door to hurt you, I will get them." I was glad that she was so aggressive; it made me feel like I could loosen up and let someone else protect me. I didn't have to worry anymore.

I'm grateful to have Yolanda as a foster parent, because in a way she is more than just a foster parent; she's a lifesaver. When she tells me (and sometimes she has to tell me this over and over), "You have to stop being the victim," I don't mind. She wants to go with me on my journeys and to help me find my way back home, to her home.

I would love to stay with Yolanda until I age out. She has accepted me, my sister and all the baggage we brought to her home. Instead of pushing us away, she's taught herself how to help us deal with our problems, and whatever we might face in the future.

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## **The First Good Christmas: I Finally Found a Home for the Holidays**

Even as a young child at home with my family, I never had a good Christmas. I was told we were Muslims so we didn't celebrate Christmas. But we didn't celebrate anything else, either.

When I came home from school with a toy from Santa Claus one year, my aunt said, "Christmas is a lie! No wishes come true, especially not for naughty kids like you." That's when it came to my attention that Christmas must be a fairy tale. I think that's when the hopes my sister and I had for a true Christmas were smashed.

We had believed that Christmas was supposed to be a time when you got a lot of nice things from your loved ones and sat around a big tree decorated with gifts, or even like a Christmas on TV where something wicked happens but good prevails. But our aunt let us know that wasn't for us. She acted like we were dirt, like we didn't matter. As I got older this was the reason the holidays seemed like days of torture.

### **Alone for the Holidays**

In the last four years my sister T. and I have been in 11 foster homes and three group homes. We were always in a new home around the holidays. We were unexpected guests in people's homes, and they never had time to buy us anything.

I would tell my sister "Merry Christmas," or we would just try to forget about it. We did try to buy each other gifts, but we had hardly any money. We would buy a lot of cookies, ice cream and cakes and blame ourselves for telling about the abuse that put us in foster care. After all, if we hadn't talked we wouldn't be alone watching Lifetime for the holidays. We had no one but each other, and occasionally that was not enough.

Over the holidays, we'd be sitting in the group homes or foster homes with different people walking in and out, looking at us like we were some kind of disease. It was hard. Many of the kids in our group home had someone to come get them, but my sister and I had no one. All we could do was just stare out our window and wonder what it would be like to wake up on Christmas morning with gifts, hugs and smiles from everyone.

I imagined a big breakfast with eggs, bacon, pancakes, waffles and fresh juice. The fantasy was so real. I could just smell the aroma, but then I would hear a voice: "Wake up, come get breakfast. It's cereal." My dream was over. Just like that I had to wake up and face the real world.

### **Those Damn Sweaters**

I remember one group home in particular that treated us on Christmas like we did not mean anything to anyone. The staff cooked the little we had in the house for our dinner and made rude comments about how they had better food at home, which made me mad.

On Christmas day, each girl was given a sweater. Only a sweater! T. and I were given the same damn color— purple—and the staff’s excuse was, “It’s because you’re twins.” Those purple things were hideous; they were big and made you look like Barney or an old grandmother who sits all day knitting those sweaters.

The girls got so mad that they started cursing, mainly because they had all written wish lists and were hoping to be getting at least one item from the list.

“I hate this insulting house. You people treat us like animals! All we get is a damn sweater!” one of the girls yelled.

“Calm down or I will call the police!” the staff yelled back. “I’m going to write you up. Don’t make me go and get my book!”

That night, many of the girls violated curfew or ran back to their abusive parents’ homes. On Christmas you just don’t want to be alone, be insulted or feel like you don’t have family.

## **No Home But the Group Home**

My sister and I were thinking about going home to see our family, too, but we had to stop and think of what could happen if we did. We wanted so much to have a safe place to go home to, but we really didn’t have that.

Our dad could abuse us physically and our mother could abuse us emotionally with her accusations about how we broke down a happy home. Our siblings could just reject us. We hadn’t seen our brothers that entire year and our mother had brainwashed them to believe that my sister and I were either crazy or just wanted all of us kids to be taken away for no reason.

We came to the conclusion that it was for the best that we stayed put. We had nowhere else to go, no home but the group home.

## **A Precious Place**

The following year we were blessed to be placed in a foster home with Yolanda C., who I call Precious because she is just phenomenal. But when we first came to her home I thought I’d be out of there in about two months. I was doubtful about her rules.

Yolanda made me do different chores like cleaning the bathroom, kitchen and living room. Then she’d be on my back about my education.

I worried that if she was that strict, she wouldn’t accept me as I was. I didn’t realize that having someone care about my education would make me want to do more to pass. I didn’t realize that I would wake up to the Christmas that I’d wanted since I was a child.

Actually, as the days of December came, I got a little anxious. Yolanda was talking about presents but I hadn’t bought presents for people in years. I thought, “What if they don’t like them?” I was scared. Yolanda never did tell me what to get her for Christmas. She just said, “I want to make sure everybody is happy.”

## The Christmas I've Always Wanted

I stopped feeling scared as the days got closer to Christmas. The tree was put up: white with colorful lights and ornaments. A music box under the tree played Christmas carols that I'd never really heard. As the hours counted down to the big day I'd waited for my whole life, I could only sit in front of the 87 gifts and imagine what was inside the ones that had my name on them.

On Christmas Eve, Yolanda allowed my foster sisters, T. and me to open one gift each before we went to bed. "Here, this is yours," she said. It was a cute bra and panty set. I had never really had my own gift before, without sharing it with my twin. I was so happy. I thanked her and gave her a hug. I felt like crying.

In the morning, Yolanda gave my sisters and me the rest of our gifts. We were so nervous we didn't want to tear the wrapping. Afterwards we all tried on our clothes like we were America's Next Top Models preparing for a series of photo shoots. We had bacon, eggs, and pancakes for breakfast—it was a feast made for a queen, I must say.

Then we went to Yolanda's mother's house for a big dinner. When I entered the hallway, the smell of turkey, ham, macaroni and cheese and all kinds of pie filled the air. I couldn't believe it. It smelled like my dream of home.

Inside it looked like Christmas with her white tree, just like Yolanda's only the ornaments were red and blue. She greeted us with kisses and hugs. We all exchanged gifts and sat around to hear stories about Yolanda when she was a little girl. It was wonderful. It felt like something I'd missed, but was starting to learn.

## A New Perspective

That Christmas changed how I view the holiday. I didn't see it as another day for my sister and me to punish ourselves, but a time for us to be around people who care for us. It meant a new start.

Hopefully this Christmas will be as joyful and tranquil as the last. I believe that my wish came true and Santa Claus gave me a complete family for Christmas, and blissful times to remember.

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# Managing Emotional “Hot Spots”: Tips for Resource Parents

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## Emotional “Hot Spots”

Safety is important for all children, but it is particularly crucial for children who have experienced trauma. For these children, the world has often been a harsh and unpredictable place. Before such children can heal, they need to feel safe and believe that there are adults in their lives who can offer safety and security.

Feeling oriented is an important part of feeling safe. To a child, coming into a new home—even the home of relatives—may feel like being sent to another planet. Some times or situations may be particularly emotionally charged for children who have experienced trauma, and may trigger a child to act out, struggle over control, or become emotionally upset. These emotional hot spots include:

- Mealtimes or other situations that involve food
- Bedtime, including getting to sleep, staying asleep, and being awakened in the morning
- Anything that involves physical boundaries, including baths, personal grooming, nudity, and privacy issues

## Food and Mealtimes

Being fed by a caregiver is one of the first and most significant interactions we have with the outside world. It is how we come to understand whether—and how—our needs will be met.

For many traumatized children, food and the experience of being fed are emotionally charged. Meals may have been inadequate or unpredictable. In some families, mealtimes may have been scenes of verbal or physical abuse. In other families, food may have been the only source of comfort. In others, children may have been forced to fend for themselves, scrounging food from dumpsters or begging from strangers.

The foods we eat, how we prepare them, and how we behave during mealtimes are also partly determined by culture. Foods that a

I made a list of things my sister and I eat so [our new foster mother] could buy our food, but she didn't buy exactly what we wanted.

She bought the wrong kind of cereal, she put ginger in the juice even though I told her not to, and the bread was some damn thick . . . bread.

All of these little things made me furious. I believed she thought it didn't matter what I told her, and that she could treat us how she wants.

A. M., former foster child

Am I too angry to love? *Represent.* Nov./Dec. 2004.

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/NovDec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.html>

child may equate with safety and comfort may seem foreign or even unhealthy to you. How we handle mealtimes can send traumatized children powerful messages about:

- Your interest in nurturing them
- How your family works
- Whether they really belong

You can help make mealtimes “safer” for the children in your care by:

- Accommodating their dietary preferences as much as possible
- Giving children a chance to help plan and prepare meals
- Ensuring that at least some of their favorite foods are available
- Setting consistent mealtimes
- Having meals together as a family
- Keeping mealtimes calm and supportive

## Sleep and Bedtime

Bedtime and sleeping may be especially difficult for traumatized children. A child suffering from traumatic stress reactions may have trouble sleeping. When children who have been through trauma close their eyes at night, images of past traumatic events may appear. When they do fall asleep, nightmares may awaken them. Being in bed can also make children feel especially vulnerable or alone. They may have been sexually abused while in bed, or thrown into bed at the end of a parent’s raging and physical abuse.

For this reason, traumatized children may avoid bedtime. They may also find waking up in the morning difficult. Children who have grown up in unstable, unpredictable environments may feel that no sooner did they feel safe enough to go to sleep than they were being asked to wake up and face the day again.

Helping a traumatized child to feel safe and protected when going to bed, sleeping, or waking can be challenging. But there are steps you can take to make these potentially frightening times safer for your children:

- Reassure children that their rooms are their personal space and will be respected by all members of the family.
- Always ask permission before sitting on a child’s bed.
- Set a consistent bedtime to give children a sense of structure and routine.
- Set up predictable, calming bedtime rituals and routines.

- Encourage a sense of control and ownership by letting children make choices about the look and feel of the bedroom.
- Acknowledge and respect children’s fears—be willing to repeatedly check under the bed and in the closet, show them that the window is locked, provide a nightlight, and provide assurances that you’ll defend them against any threat.
- Let children decide how they want to be awakened. An alarm clock might be too jarring for children who are always on alert for danger. How about a clock radio tuned to their favorite station? A touch on the shoulder?
- Make sure children know exactly what to expect each morning by creating dependable routines so they can start the day reassured of their safety.

Children who are having a great deal of trouble with bedtime and sleep may need help from a therapist specifically trained in trauma treatment.

## Grooming and Personal Boundaries

Many children who have experienced physical and sexual abuse have learned to see their bodies as the enemy, or as something that needs to be hidden and made as unattractive as possible. Seemingly positive things like a hug, having their hair brushed, or a hot shower may have very different meanings for children whose bodies have been violated. So we need to be very sensitive to our children’s trauma history when it comes to situations that involve physical boundaries, including personal grooming, privacy, and touch.

Children who have been abused and neglected may never have learned that their bodies should be cared for and protected. Sexual and physical abuse can leave children feeling disconnected from—or even at odds with—their physical selves, with no sense of ownership, comfort, or pride in their bodies. Instead, their bodies may feel like “constant reminders not only of what has happened to them but of how little they are worth.”<sup>1</sup>

All too often, children come into care with teeth that are desperately in need of cleaning, hair so tangled it’s hard to get a brush through it, or clothes that are soiled or ill-fitting. They may be resistant to grooming, to bathing, to anything that involves seeing or touching their bodies.

I don’t think there was a time when I wasn’t abused as a child. In order to survive the abuse, I made believe that the real me was separate from my body. That way, the abuse was happening not really to me, but just this skin I’m in.

Still, my body sometimes betrayed me. Crying when I wanted to remain strong, becoming tired and refusing to obey my commands to stay awake, and, most horribly, physically responding to sexual advances. It seemed to me like my body had a mind of its own. I hated the thought of sexual contact, yet my body would respond to it, even when it was unwanted.

C. M., former foster child

My body betrayed me. *Represent*. Sept./Oct. 2003.

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/SeptOct2003/FCYU-2003-09-24.htm>

Helping such children to feel safe enough to respect and care for their bodies will take time and patience. Steps you can take include:

- Respect children’s physical boundaries—don’t assume a child wants to be hugged; take cues from the child before initiating physical contact.
- Introduce older children to all the workings of the bathroom, and make it clear that their time in the bathroom is private and that no one will be walking in on them during bath time.
- When helping to bathe younger children, be careful to ask permission before touching and to be clear about exactly why, how, and where you will be touching them.
- Give young children the time to splash around, play with water toys, and enjoy the positive sensations of bath time.

## References

1. Pughe B. & Philpot T. (2007). *Living alongside a child’s recovery*. London, UK: Kingsley Publishers.



# The Importance of Touch: Caring for Young Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

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Touch is essential to healthy development, yet for children who have been abused, it can prompt more anxiety than comfort. Children—particularly very young children—who have survived physical abuse may come to associate all human touch with pain, and may find it difficult to accept physical affection and comfort from their caregivers. Those who have experienced sexual abuse may not understand that touch doesn't have to be sexual.

It can take time for traumatized young children to accept—and give—touch in a way that is comforting, appropriate, and that reinforces their self-worth and self-esteem. It may take many, many small experiences of pleasure and safety to counteract the big experiences of trauma and pain they have endured. Below are some simple steps to take when caring for children who have difficulty with physical contact.

“Touch seems to be as essential as sunlight.”

—Diane Ackerman

*A Natural History of the Senses* (1990).  
New York: Vintage Books

- **Be consistent and reliable in meeting the child's physical needs.** Every time these needs are met—whether for food, a clean diaper, or getting back to sleep after waking—the child will begin to make new associations. The more you can anticipate the child's needs before he or she cries, the more the child will be able to “take in” the wonderful new experience of being cared for.
- **Create a soothing environment.** Because loud noises can be strong trauma reminders for babies and young children who have been physically abused, it's important to keep the environment as soothing as possible: soft music, soft light, and soft, calm voices. Potential trauma reminders such as an alarm clock going off or even a phone ringing should be avoided as much as possible.
- **Avoid surprising the child.** Sudden or unexpected contact is all the more scary for traumatized babies, so it's important to describe what you are doing before you do it: “I am going to change your diaper now” or “Here is your nice bottle.” Though babies may not understand what you are saying, they will be calmed by the sound of a voice that is soft and soothing. Babies have also been shown to respond well to soft “shushing” noises.
- **Use texture and movement to soothe and calm.** Babies who are very distressed by human touch may still be comforted by the sensation of soft fabrics or plush toys. Giving children plush blankets or stuffed animals to cuddle can help them to get used to pleasant sensations against their skin, which you can then build on. Babies are also comforted by gentle swinging motions. Babies who cannot tolerate touch may benefit from being in a baby swing or simply rocked gently in a cradle or carriage.

- **Take it slow.** When it comes to touch, the first step may be to just be present in the child’s room, sitting by the crib, and singing or talking to the child in a soft, calm voice. It may take many days or weeks of such “being present” before the child can tolerate even a simple touch, such as a gentle stroke of the arm. If the child avoids eye contact, don’t force it. Wait for the child to initiate eye contact, and reinforce the action with a smile and comforting words or sounds.

The more “tuned in” we become to children’s nonverbal signals, the more we will be able to build on their positive responses. For example, if you notice that a baby seems to calm down when sucking on her hand, you may be able to offer comfort simply by helping her get her hand to her mouth.

# Coping with Trauma Reminders

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## What are trauma reminders?

Many children in the foster care system have been through multiple traumatic events, often at the hands of those they trusted to take care of them. **When faced with people, situations, places, or things that remind them of these events, children may reexperience the intense and disturbing feelings tied to the original trauma.** These “trauma reminders” can lead to behaviors that seem out of place in the current situation, but were appropriate—and perhaps even helpful—at the time of the original traumatic event. For example:

- A seven-year-old boy whose father and older brother fought physically in front of him becomes frantic and tries to separate classmates playfully wrestling in the schoolyard.
- A three-year-old girl who witnessed her father beating her mother clings to her resource mother, crying hysterically when her resource parents have a mild dispute in front of her.
- A nine-year-old girl who was repeatedly abused in the basement of a family friend’s house refuses to enter the resource family’s basement playroom.
- A toddler who saw her cousin lying in a pool of blood after a drive-by shooting has a tantrum after a bottle of catsup spills on the kitchen floor.
- A teenager who was abused by her stepfather refuses to go to gym class after meeting the new gym teacher, who wears the same aftershave as her stepfather.
- A two-year-old boy who had been molested by a man in a Santa Claus suit runs screaming out of a YMCA Christmas party.

## What happens when a child responds to a trauma reminder?

When faced with a trauma reminder, children may feel frightened, jumpy, angry, or shut down. Their hearts may pound or they may freeze in their tracks, just as one might do when confronting an immediate danger. Or they may experience physical symptoms such as nausea or dizziness. They may feel inexplicably guilty or ashamed or experience a sense of dissociation, as if they are in a dream or outside their own bodies.

Sometimes children are aware of their reaction and its connection to the original event. More often, however, they are unaware of the root cause of their feelings and may even feel frightened by the intensity of their reaction.

## How can I help?

Children who have experienced trauma may face so many trauma reminders in the course of an ordinary day that the whole world seems dangerous, and no adult seems deserving of trust. Resource parents are in a unique position to help these children recognize safety and begin to trust adults who do indeed deserve their trust.

It’s very difficult for children in the midst of a reaction to a trauma reminder to calm themselves, especially if they do not understand why they are experiencing such intense feelings. Despite

reassurance, these children may be convinced that danger is imminent or that the “bad thing” is about to happen again. It is therefore critical to create as safe an environment as possible. **Children who have experienced trauma need repeated reassurances of their safety.** When a child is experiencing a trauma reminder, it is important to state very clearly and specifically the reasons why the child is now safe. Each time a child copes with a trauma reminder and learns once more that he or she is finally safe, the world becomes a little less dangerous, and other people a little more reliable.

## Tips for Helping Your Child Identify and Cope with Trauma Reminders

- **Learn as many specifics as you can about what your child experienced so you can identify when your child is reacting to a reminder.** Look for patterns (time of day, month, season, activity, location, sounds, sights, smells) that will help you understand when your child is reacting. Help your child to recognize these trauma reminders. Sometimes, just realizing where a feeling came from can help to minimize its intensity.
- **Do not force your child into situations that seem to cause unbearable distress.** Allow your child to avoid the most intense reminders, at least initially, until he or she feels safe and trusts you.
- When your child is reacting to a reminder, **help the child to discriminate between past experiences and the present one.** Calmly point out all the ways in which the current situation is different from the past. Part of the way children learn to overcome their powerful responses is by distinguishing between the past and the present. They learn, on both an emotional (feeling) and cognitive (thinking and understanding) level, that the new experience is different from the old one.
- **Provide tools to manage emotional and physical reactions.** Deep breathing, meditation, or other techniques may help a child to manage emotional and physical reactions to reminders. If you are unfamiliar with such techniques, ask a counselor to help.
- **Recognize the seriousness of what the child went through, and empathize with his or her feelings.** Don't be surprised or impatient if your child continues to react to reminders weeks, months, or even years after the events. Help your child to recognize that reactions to trauma reminders are normal and not a sign of being out of control, crazy, or weak. Shame about reactions can make the experience worse.
- **Anticipate that anniversaries of events, holidays, and birthdays may serve as reminders.**
- **With your child, identify ways that you can best reassure and comfort during a trauma reminder.** These might be a look of support, a reassurance of safety, words of comfort, a physical gesture, or help in distinguishing between the present and the past.
- **Seek professional help if your child's distress is extreme,** or if avoidance of trauma reminders is seriously limiting your child's life or movement forward.
- **Be self-aware.** A child's reaction to a trauma reminder may serve to remind you of something bad that happened in your own past. Work to separate your own reactions from those of your child.

## Stress Busters for Kids Worksheet

When. . .	What helps me feel calm and relaxed?
I get up in the morning	
I have to do something I don't like at school	
I am having a hard time concentrating	
I am worried or scared about something	
I am sad	
Something reminds me of something bad that happened	
There are too many people or too much noise	
It is too quiet or I am lonely or bored	
I am so excited I can't wait for something!	
I feel like moving around but I can't (in school or church maybe)	
In the evening, before bedtime	
I am in bed and can't sleep	
Some other time: (name it)	



## Module 4: Building a Safe Place

### Additional Resources

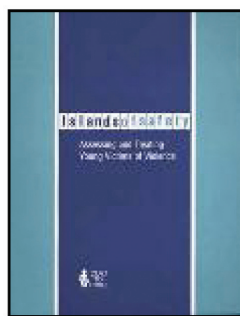
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#### Books and Journals for Parents



Osofsky, J., & Fenichel, E. (Eds). (1994). *Caring for infants and toddlers in violent environments: Hurt, healing and hope*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

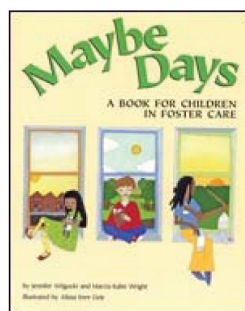
This special issue of the Zero to Three journal presents practical guidelines for parents, childcare providers, community police, and mental health professionals caring for very young children who witness or are victimized by community violence, family violence, and abuse. It was written with a threefold purpose: (1) to look at what it means to be a parent in a violent environment; (2) to address the expanded concerns of caregivers, teachers, and other community helpers; and (3) to discuss possible interventions and treatment strategies.



Osofsky, J., & Fenichel, E. (Eds). (2002). *Islands of safety: Assessing and treating young victims of violence*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

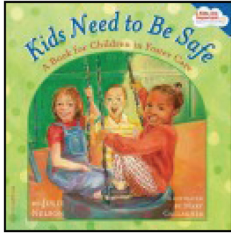
An abridged edition of a special issue of the Zero to Three journal designed for adults who care for and/or come in contact with young children. The authors guide readers through recognizing the full range of symptoms and behaviors that may stem from infants' and toddlers' exposure to violence; supporting those giving care to traumatized young children, and designing and carrying out treatment plans to help children and their families cope and recover.

#### Books for Children



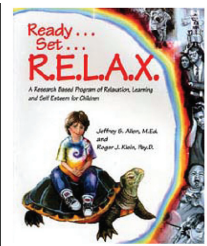
Wilgocki, J., & Wright, M. K. (2002). *Maybe days: A book for children in foster care*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 4–8) Will I live with my parents again? Will I stay with my foster parents forever? For children in foster care, the answer to many questions is often “maybe.” *Maybe Days* addresses the questions, feelings, and concerns these children most often face. Honest and reassuring, it also provides basic information that children want and need to know, including the roles of various people in the foster care system and whom to ask for help. An extensive afterword for adults caring for foster children describes the child’s experience, underscores the importance of open communication, and outlines a variety of ways to help children adjust to the “maybe days”—and to thrive.



Nelson, J., & Nelson, J. (2005). *Kids need to be safe: A book for children in foster care*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publications.

(Preschool to grade 1) Kids are important. They need safe places to live, and safe places to play. For some kids, this means living with foster parents. In simple words and full-color illustrations, this book explains why some kids move to foster homes, what foster parents do, and ways kids might feel during foster care. Children often believe that they are in foster care because they are “bad.” This book makes it clear that the troubles in their lives are not their fault; the message throughout is one of hope and support. Includes resources and information for parents, foster parents, social workers, counselors, and teachers.



Allen, J. S., & Klein, R. J. (1996). *Ready, set, R.E.L.A.X.: A research-based program of relaxation, learning and self-esteem for children*. Watertown, WI: Inner Coaching.

(Ages 5–13) This book equips children with tools to overcome anxiety through the use of music, muscle relaxation, and storytelling to promote learning, imagination, and self-esteem. This fully researched program is used across the country by teachers, counselors, parents, and medical professionals as a preventive tool and intervention strategy. The 66 scripts focus on the following themes: R=Releasing Tension; E=Enjoying Life; L=Learning; A=Appreciating Others; X=X-panding Your Knowledge.

## Games



### *Self-Calming Cards*

(All ages) What can kids do when they're angry, anxious or frustrated? How about the “mad” dance? Or stringing beads? Or kneading bread? These are just a few of the dozens of self-calming strategies explained in this card deck. Each of the 24 illustrated cards describes how you can soothe yourself with a different method—physical, auditory/verbal, visual, creative, self-nurturer and humor. Another 16 cards provide step-by-step instructions for games and activities to use with the calming cards. Written in both English and Spanish, these cards and the accompanying instruction sheet explain how parents and teachers can introduce the cards and the concept of self-calming. The materials also discuss how adults can model the use of such self-soothing techniques as taking a warm bath, making a joke to defuse a situation or singing a silly song. Each calming method includes suggested activities for a range of ages, from toddler to adult.

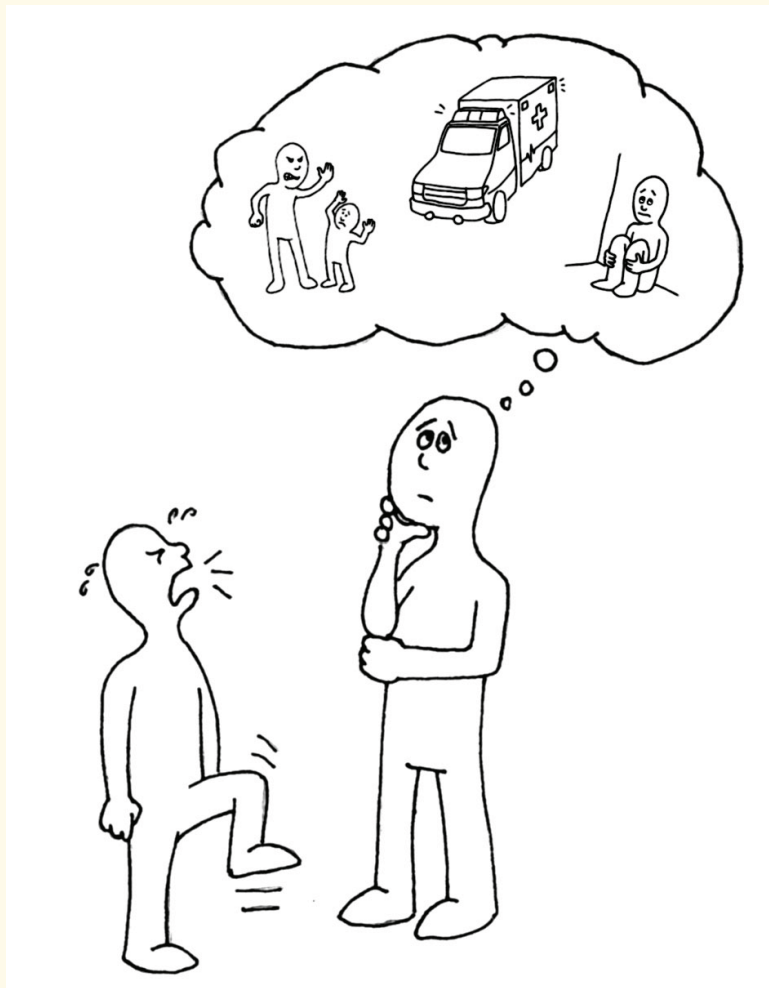
### **Available from:**

Parenting Press (<http://www.parentingpress.com>): [http://www.parentingpress.com/b\\_calmcd.html](http://www.parentingpress.com/b_calmcd.html)

Special Needs Project: <http://www.specialneeds.com/books.asp?id=14330>

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Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors



## Learning Objectives

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After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the cognitive triangle and apply it to a child who has experienced trauma.
- Identify at least three reasons why children who have experienced trauma may act out.
- Describe at least three ways you can help children develop new emotional skills and positive behaviors.





Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

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### Seeing Below the Surface



Child's behaviors

Child's feelings, thoughts,  
expectations, and  
beliefs

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### Essential Elements 3 and 4



3. Help your child to understand and manage overwhelming emotions.
4. Help your child to understand and modify problem behaviors.

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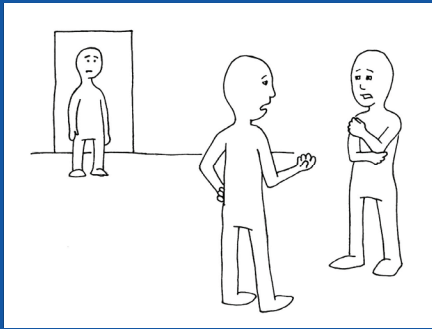
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## What if . . . ? (Group Activity)



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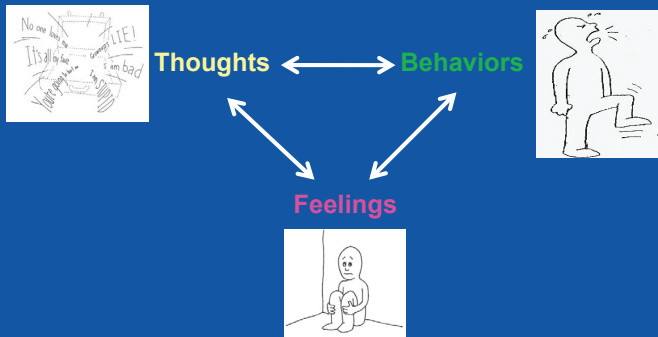
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## The Cognitive Triangle



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## Trauma and the Triangle



Children who have experienced trauma may find it hard to:

- See the connection between their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
- Understand and express their own emotional reactions
- Accurately read other people's emotional cues
- Control their reactions to threats or trauma reminders

(Continued)

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## Trauma and the Triangle

(Continued)



Children may act out as a way of:

- Reenacting patterns or relationships from the past
- Increasing interaction, even if the interactions are negative
- Keeping caregivers at a physical or emotional distance
- “Proving” the beliefs in their Invisible Suitcase
- Venting frustration, anger, or anxiety
- Protecting themselves

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*Whenever I feel threatened I get this feeling that I want to hurt anybody who might try to harm me and my sister.*

*I started cursing at the foster mom. I wanted her to lose control. I figured that sooner or later she would say something that would hurt me. I wanted to hurt her first. . .*

*Later, I felt depressed. I knew I'd acted out of control. When I get angry I don't even realize what I do and I hurt the people around me. . .*

*I feel sad that I'm not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? Reprint, Nov./Dec. 2004. Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/NovDec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.htm>

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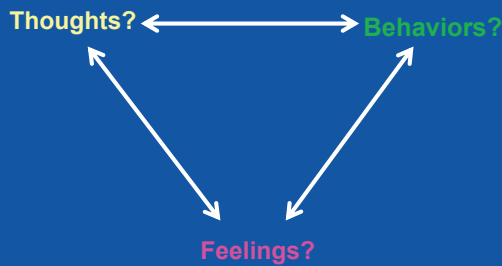
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## Decoding the Triangle (Group Activity)



(Continued)

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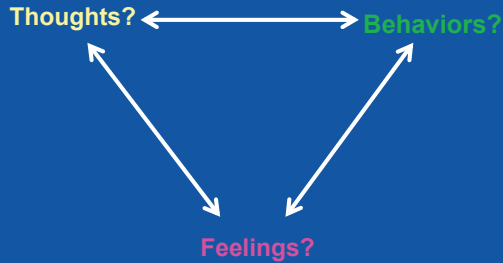
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## Decoding the Triangle (Continued)



What are your child's . . .



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*Experience is biology. . . Parents are the active sculptors of their children's growing brains.*

—Daniel J. Siegel, M. D.  
& Mary Hartzell, M. Ed.

Siegel, D.J. & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

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## How You Can Help



- **Differentiate** yourself from past caregivers.
- **Tune in** to your child's emotions.
- **Set an example** of the emotional expression and behaviors you expect.
- **Encourage** positive emotional expression and behaviors by supporting the child's strengths and interests.
- **Correct** negative behaviors and inappropriate or destructive emotional expression, and help your child **build** new behaviors and emotional skills.

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## Differentiate



Take care not to:

- “Buy into” the beliefs in their invisible suitcases
- React in anger or the heat of the moment
- Take behavior at face value
- Take it personally

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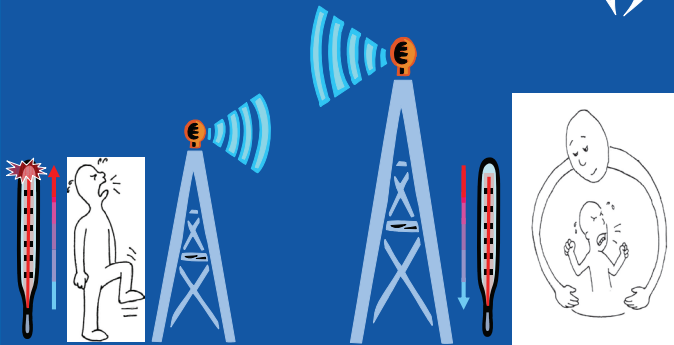
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## Tune In



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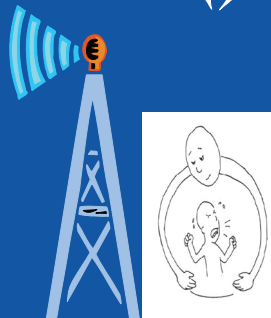
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## Tune In (Continued)



- Help the child identify and put into words the feelings beneath the actions.
- Acknowledge and validate the child's feelings.
- Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.



(Continued)

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## Tune In (Continued)



- Let the child know it's okay to talk about painful things.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Be reassuring, but be honest.



(Continued)

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## Tune In (Continued)



Provide opportunities to practice emotional skills in playful, nonthreatening ways:

- Feelings thermometer/feelings charts
- Feelings charades
- Other practice activities
- Games and storybooks

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## Let's Play . . .



What's my emotion?

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## Set an Example



Express the full range of emotions:

- Stay clear, calm, and consistent.
- Be honest and genuine.
- Let your child know that it's normal to feel different (or mixed) emotions at the same time.

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*[One day] my rabbit died. I started to cry. That rabbit was so small and defenseless. It needed me and I let it die. Then [my foster mother] hugged me. "If that happened to my cat . . . I would feel the same way that you do," she said. She wanted my rabbit to be buried and offered to buy me another one. That's how I realized she wasn't a fake.*

*I felt different at that moment. It was like she felt the anger that I had inside of me, and was saying that it was OK to feel that way. That it was OK to be sad and for me to let my guard down . . . That it was OK to let someone into my world and let them help me.*

— A. M.

Learning to love again. Represent. July/Aug 2006.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JulyAug2006/2006-07-04b.htm>

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## What happened? (Group Activity)



- Why did A. M. react the way she did?
- What did her foster mother do right?
- Have you ever experienced something similar with the children in your care?

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**Let's take a break!**

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## Encourage



Encourage positive behaviors:

- “Catch” your child being good.
- Praise, praise, praise!
  - Be specific.
  - Be prompt.
  - Be warm.
- Strive for at least **six praises** for every **one correction**.

*(Continued)*

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## Encourage *(Continued)*



Encourage and support the child's strengths and interests:

- Offer choices whenever possible.
- Let children “do it themselves.”
- Recognize and encourage the child's unique interests and talents.
- Help children master a skill.

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## Taking Stock (Group Activity)



(Continued)

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## Taking Stock (Continued)



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## Achieving a Balance



- What talents/skills/interests can you encourage?
- Where can you give the child some control?
- What fun activities/interests can you share?
- What kinds of praise would your child appreciate?
- What kind of rewards would be most meaningful?

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## Correct and Build



When correcting negative or inappropriate behavior and setting consequences:

- Be clear, calm, and consistent.
- Target one behavior at a time.
- Avoid shaming or threatening.
- Keep the child's age (and "emotional age") in mind.
- Be prepared to "pick your battles."

(Continued)

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## Correct and Build (Continued)



Focus on helping your child . . .

- Understand the links between thoughts, feelings, and behavior
- Understand the negative impact of his or her behavior
- Identify alternatives to problem/negative behaviors
- Practice techniques for changing negative thoughts and calming runaway emotions

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## Dealing with Problem Behaviors (Group Activity)



- What are the negative effects of this behavior on your child's life?
- How can you help your child to understand these effects?
- What alternatives can you suggest for this behavior?
- What consequences can you set if the behavior continues?

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## Module 5: Wrap Up

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NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network



## **Module 5**

### ***Supplemental Handouts***



# Tuning In to Your Child's Emotions: Tips for Resource Parents

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As resource parents, we can play an important role in helping our children to understand, express, and regulate their emotions. Here are some crucial dos and don'ts to keep in mind when reacting to—and talking about—children's emotions.

## Things to Do

### ***Validate the child's emotions***

When your child expresses an emotion, let him or her know that you have heard, understood, and accepted how he or she is feeling. Validating emotions will help your child feel comfortable and secure, and encourage the child to express emotions and have conversations with you about them.

Keep in mind that validating an emotion does **not** mean accepting a problem behavior (such as hitting when angry or frustrated). You can validate an emotion but, at the same time, set appropriate limits on behavior (“I can tell it makes you really mad when your sister takes your toys . . . but it is not okay to hit your sister.”)

### ***Be empathetic***

Being empathetic lets your child know that you understand his or her emotion. Try to:

- Take your child's perspective
- Let your child know you understand the way he or she feels
- Use warmth and affection

Empathy also can be a powerful tool for helping children to recognize the deeper, more complicated emotions that may lie just beneath their initial reactions. As you empathize with your child, try to help him or her to understand the mixed feelings he or she may be feeling, and to make finer distinctions between related emotions such as anger, frustration, disappointment, etc. For example:

Child: “I can't do my homework. I'm mad. School is stupid.”

Parent: “Sounds like you're getting frustrated with your homework. It is getting pretty hard.”

Child: “Dad didn't pick me up this weekend like he said he would. I hate him.”

Parent: “Sounds like you are really mad at Dad. I wonder if you are also feeling kind of sad or hurt?”

## **Let your child know his or her feelings are normal**

Normalization makes your child feel comfortable with his or her emotion(s). Let your child know that you sometimes feel the same way and that other people do, too.

Example: “I bet a lot of other kids also feel scared when the lights go out in a storm.”

## **Things to Avoid**

### ***Invalidating the child's emotions***

Steer clear of anything that may devalue what your child is feeling, such as suggesting that something wasn't as bad as the child felt it was (“There's nothing to be scared of”) or that he or she should have gotten over it (“Big boys aren't scared of the dark”). Invalidating can make your child feel uncomfortable with his or her emotions and uneasy talking to you about feelings and experiences.

### ***Lecturing or interrogating the child***

Before giving advice or explaining the situation, focus on how your child feels. Although asking questions can help you to understand your child's perspective, bombarding him or her with questions can also move the conversation away from feelings. This is especially true if you focus only on the specifics of what happened (“What did Johnny do?”), as opposed to what the child experienced (“How did it make you feel?”). In particular, avoid questions that are criticism in disguise. (“Why would you do that?” or “What did you do to make Mommy so mad?”)

### ***Telling the child what to feel***

“Should” statements can send a message that the child has no right to feel the way he or she does. Avoid saying things that question or doubt your child's experience (“Are you sure you felt so sad?”) or that tell your child what he or she is supposed to feel (“You shouldn't be mad at your brother”).

### ***Hanging the child out to dry***

When your child shares something emotional, don't leave your child waiting for a response. Traumatized children, in particular, need reassurance that their feelings are worthy of your attention and care. Even if the timing isn't ideal, stop and acknowledge what the child has shared, and let him or her know that you are willing to listen.

### ***Criticizing or blaming the child***

Avoid statements that blame or criticize your child for what he or she is feeling, even if the child was the cause of the situation.

Adapted with permission from: Shipman, K., & Fitzgerald, M. (n.d.) *Teaching caregivers to talk with children about emotion: Implications for treating child trauma*. [Slide presentation]. Available online at [http://www.chadwickcenter.org/CD/SDConference/Presentations/C9\\_Shipman-Fitzgerald\\_Teaching%20Caregivers%20To%20Talk%20with%20Children%20about%20Emotion.pdf](http://www.chadwickcenter.org/CD/SDConference/Presentations/C9_Shipman-Fitzgerald_Teaching%20Caregivers%20To%20Talk%20with%20Children%20about%20Emotion.pdf)

## “Make Your Own” Feelings Chart

**Instructions:** Look through magazines, or color copies of photos of family and friends, and cut out pictures of faces that show you each of the feelings named below. You will notice there are blank spots for you to add other feelings you would like to include.

<b>Happy</b>	<b>Calm</b>	<b>Tired</b>	<b>Sad</b>
<b>Worried</b>	<b>Scared</b>	<b>Peaceful</b>	<b>Confused</b>
<b>Angry</b>	<b>Excited</b>	<b>Lonely</b>	<b>Proud</b>
<b>Hurt</b>	<b>Shy</b>	<b>Stressed-Out</b>	<b>Other _____</b>
<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>

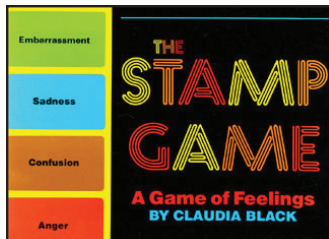


# Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

## Additional Resources

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### Board Games



#### ***The Stamp Game: A Game of Feelings***

(All ages) *The Stamp Game* is an innovative tool for helping people identify and express feelings. The purpose of *The Stamp Game* is to help players better identify, clarify, and discuss feelings. Players will be able to relate more honestly to others as they learn to express feelings. As a result, players become more effective problem-solvers, and the identification and expression of feelings brings clarity to players' needs, which in turn leads to enhanced self-esteem. The game is a wonderful tool to equalize those who use words as a defense but have difficulty being emotionally honest, and for those who have great difficulty being articulate on any level. Playing *The Stamp Game* is a novel, fun, and meaningful way for players to learn about themselves and each other.

Available from:

Author's Den (<http://www.authorsden.com>):  
<http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewwork.asp?AuthorID=416>

ClaudiaBlack.com (<http://claudiablack.com>)  
[https://claudiablack.com/toD\\_products/product.php/15.html](https://claudiablack.com/toD_products/product.php/15.html)

Mentor Books (<http://www.mentorbooks.com>):  
[http://www.mentorbooks.com/?page=shop/flypage&product\\_id=3445&CLSN\\_1012=121536690410128eb1cef1042d75281f](http://www.mentorbooks.com/?page=shop/flypage&product_id=3445&CLSN_1012=121536690410128eb1cef1042d75281f)

Self-Help Warehouse (<http://www.selfhelpwarehouse.com>):  
[http://www.selfhelpwarehouse.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product\\_Code=CGA151&Category\\_Code=CFE&Product\\_Count=2](http://www.selfhelpwarehouse.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=CGA151&Category_Code=CFE&Product_Count=2)



#### ***Emotional Bingo***

(Versions for ages 6–12 and 12–18) Everybody knows how to play Bingo, but this version requires players to identify feelings rather than numbers on their Bingo cards. Ideal for counseling groups or classrooms, *Emotional Bingo* not only helps children learn to recognize various feelings, it also teaches empathy—a trait associated with lower incidence of violent behavior. Game rules provide opportunities for children to discuss their own feelings and to respond empathetically to the feelings of others.

*Emotional Bingo* offers a new, yet familiar, approach to feelings that appeals to kids of all ages. The game includes 32 Emotional Bingo Cards (English on one side; Spanish on the other), a

Poster, Tokens, Call-Out Cards, and a helpful Leader’s Guide with discussion guidelines and counseling suggestions. It is available in child (ages 6–12) and teen (ages 12–18) versions. The teen version features feelings that are common in adolescence.

Available from:

Creative Therapy Store (<http://portal.creativetherapystore.com>):

[http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=94,54451&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?_pageid=94,54451&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

PCI Education (<http://www.pcieducation.com>):

<http://www.pcieducation.com/store/item.aspx?ItemId=44127>

Western Psychological Services (<http://portal.wpspublish.com>):

[http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=53,70284&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?_pageid=53,70284&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)



### **Feeling Good**

(Ages 9–adult) Sometimes we need a little help to feel good about ourselves, whether it’s a compliment from a friend or a kind gesture from a neighbor. And now there’s another source of help: All you have to do is play the *Feeling Good* game. “Feeling Cards” get players thinking positive thoughts and recognizing what makes them feel bad. “Doing Cards” give players the opportunity to act out feelings through role-playing and drawing.

Originally developed to help people recover self-confidence and optimism after traumatic events or situations, *Feeling Good* encourages players to feel good about themselves by recognizing, understanding, and expressing their emotions.

Available from:

Creative Therapy Store (<http://portal.creativetherapystore.com>):

[http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=94,54516&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?_pageid=94,54516&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Western Psychological Services (<http://portal.wpspublish.com>):

[http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=53,70424&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?_pageid=53,70424&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)



### **Use Your I's**

(Ages 5–10) Learning to be assertive instead of aggressive can be effective in reducing antisocial behaviors. One of the best ways to teach children assertiveness skills is by training them to use “I-Messages.” An I-Message is a way to express your feelings in a nonthreatening manner by structuring statements in a specific way.

When children use I-Messages to express themselves, they are more likely to be heard and less likely to get into conflict.



*Use Your I's* is a board game that teaches children (ages 5–10) how to express their feelings without jeopardizing the rights of others. Game cards provide realistic situations that provoke emotions such as anger, guilt, humiliation, happiness, and embarrassment. Players learn to verbally describe their feelings to others and explain why they feel the way they do. *Use Your I's* also helps children become comfortable using the first-person pronoun to share their feelings.

Available from:

Creative Therapy Store (<http://portal.creativetherapystore.com>):

[http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=94,54507&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?_pageid=94,54507&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Western Psychological Services (<http://portal.wpspublish.com>):

[http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=53,70404&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?_pageid=53,70404&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

## Card Games



### **My Ups and Downs**

(Preschool–adolescence) These large (3.5” by 5.75”), colorful cards feature 17 captivating kids who express 34 different emotions. Children can compare their own feelings with those depicted on the cards. This is a flexible tool that can be used in a number of ways: you can play memory games, make up stories, or play a new form of Old Maid (complete instructions included).

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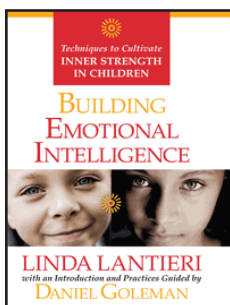
Western Psychological Services (<http://portal.wpspublish.com>):

[http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=53,70356&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.wpspublish.com/portal/page?_pageid=53,70356&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Creative Therapy Store (<http://portal.creativetherapystore.com>):

[http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?\\_pageid=94,54487&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.creativetherapystore.com/portal/page?_pageid=94,54487&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

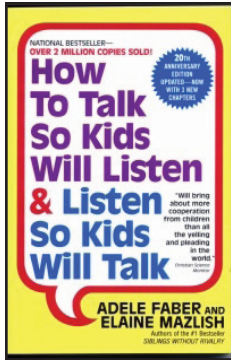
## Books for Parents



### **On Building Emotional Skills**

Lantieri, L., & Goleman, D. (2008). *Building emotional intelligence: Techniques to cultivate inner strength in children*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc.

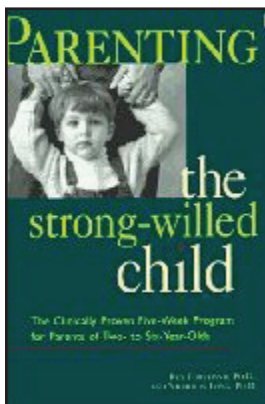
Guide for helping children quiet their minds, calm their bodies, and identify and manage their emotions.



### **On Talking About Feelings**

Faber, E., & Mazlish, E. (1999). *How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

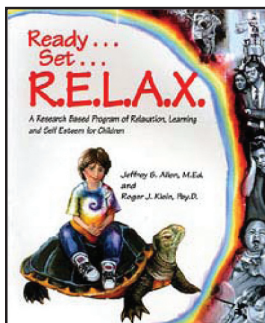
This classic book on communicating with children offers a wealth of clear, down-to-earth advice, including information on how to cope with your child’s negative feelings (frustration, disappointment, anger, etc.), tips for expressing your own feelings without being hurtful, and techniques for resolving family conflicts peacefully.



### **On Changing Problem Behaviors**

Forehand, R. L., & Long, N. J. (2002) *Parenting the strong-willed child: The clinically proven five-week program for parents of two- to six-year-olds*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Professional.

(Ages 2–6) Based on more than 40 years of collective research, child behavior experts Rex Forehand, PhD, and Nicholas Long, PhD, have devised a program to help you find positive and manageable solutions to your child’s difficult behavior. Now in a revised and updated edition, *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child* is a self-guided program for managing disruptive young children based on a clinical treatment program.



### **On Relaxation Techniques**

Allen, J. S., & Klein, R. J. (1996). *Ready, set, R.E.L.A.X.: A research-based program of relaxation, learning and self-esteem for children*. Watertown, WI: Inner Coaching.

(Ages 5–13) This book equips children with tools to overcome anxiety through the use of music, muscle relaxation, and storytelling to promote learning, imagination, and self-esteem. This fully researched program is used across the country by teachers, counselors, parents, and medical professionals as a preventive tool and intervention strategy. The 66 scripts focus on the following themes: R=Releasing Tension; E=Enjoying Life; L=Learning; A=Appreciating Others; X=X-panding Your Knowledge.



### **Books for Children**

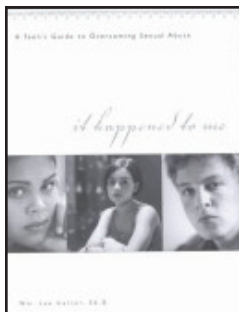
#### **On Trauma**

Holmes, M., & Mudlaff, S. J. (2000). *A terrible thing happened: A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 4–8) Sherman Smith saw the most terrible thing happen. At first he tried to forget about it, but soon something inside him started to bother

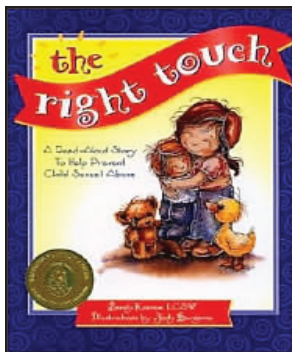
him. He felt nervous for no reason. Sometimes his stomach hurt. He had bad dreams. And he started to feel angry and do mean things, which got him in trouble. Then he met Ms. Maple, who helped him talk about the terrible thing that he had tried to forget. Now Sherman is feeling much better. This gently told and tenderly illustrated story is for children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode, including physical abuse, school or gang violence, accidents, homicide, suicide, and natural disasters such as floods or fire. An afterword by Sasha J. Mudlaff written for parents and other caregivers offers extensive suggestions for helping traumatized children, including a list of other sources that focus on specific events.

### **On Sexual Abuse and Behaviors**



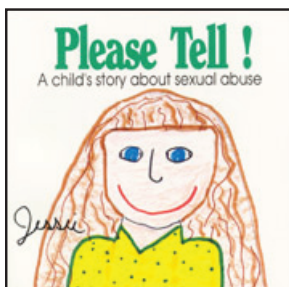
Carter, W. L. (2002). *It happened to me: A teen's guide to overcoming sexual abuse*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

(Young adult) Most sexual trauma survivors find the early adult years crucial for recovery. During this time they have the best combination of motivation, capacity for insight, and support to begin the process of healing. Written by a psychologist who works with sexually abused teens, *It Happened to Me* helps young adults reflect on what happened, examine its impact on their lives, and begin to develop healthy relationships.



Kleven, S. (1998). *The right touch: A read-aloud story to help prevent child sexual abuse*. Bellevue, WA: Illumination Arts Publishing Company.

(Preschool to third grade [8–9-year-olds]). *The Right Touch* reaches beyond the usual scope of a children's picture book. It is a parenting book that introduces a very difficult topic—the sexual abuse of young children. This gentle, thoughtful story can be read aloud to a child by any trusted caregiver. In the story, young Jimmy's mom explains the difference between touches that are positive and touches that are secret, deceptive, or forced. She tells him how to resist inappropriate touching, affirming that abuse is not the child's fault. The introduction provides valuable information about sexual abuse and guidance on what to do if your child experiences an abusive situation. Jody Bergsma's gentle illustrations soften the impact of this story; yet this portrayal of a dangerous situation is very realistic. If your child is old enough to sit still and listen to a story, he or she is old enough for *The Right Touch*.

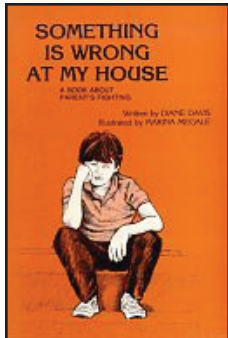


Ottenweiler, J. (1991). *Please tell!: A child's story about sexual abuse*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Foundation.

(Ages 9–12) Nine-year-old Jessie's words and illustrations help other sexually abused children know that they're not alone; that it's okay to talk about their feelings, and that the abuse wasn't their fault. Reaching out to other children in a way that no adult can, Jessie's

words carry the message, “It’s okay to tell; help can come when you tell.” *Please Tell!* is an excellent tool for therapists, counselors, child protection workers, teachers, and parents dealing with children affected by sexual abuse. Jessie’s story adds a sense of hope for what should be, and the knowledge that the child protection system can work for children. Simple, direct, and from the heart, Jessie gives children the permission and the courage to deal with sexual abuse.

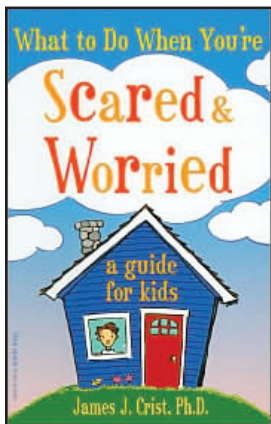
### **On Violence in the Home**



Davis, D. (1984). *Something is wrong at my house*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

(Ages 3–12) Angry, fearful, and lonely. That’s how kids often feel when their parents fight. Based on a true story, *Something Is Wrong at My House* shows how a boy in a violent household finds a way to care for himself and how he obtains help from outside his home. Designed with two sets of text, one for older children and the other, with illustrations, for the very young. Available in Spanish.

### **On Dealing with Feelings**



Crist, J. J. (2004). *What to do when you’re scared and worried: A guide for kids*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.

(Ages 9–12) From a fear of spiders to panic attacks, kids have worries and fears, just like adults. But while adults have access to a lot of helpful information, that hasn’t been true for kids—until now. Drawing on his years of experience in helping children deal with anxiety, James Crist, PhD, has written a book that kids can turn to when they need advice, reassurance, and ideas. He starts by telling young readers that all kids are scared and worried sometimes; they’re not alone. He explains where fears and worries come from and how the mind and body work together to make fears worse or better. He describes various kinds of fears and suggests 10 Fear Chasers and Worry Erasers kids can try to feel safer, stronger, and calmer. The second part of the book focuses on phobias, separation anxiety, OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), and other problems too big for kids to handle on their own, and explains what it’s like to get counseling. Includes a special “Note to Grown-ups” and a list of resources.

Crary E. (1992 to 1994). *Dealing with feelings* book series. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

(Ages 3–9) This six-part series acknowledges specific feelings and offers children several ways to deal with them. Each book features a choose-your-own-adventure format, and shows what different outcomes of choices might be—allowing the children to back up and try another solution if they don’t like the outcome, or to try a variety of choices to see how each might turn out.

*I'm Furious*—When Matt's little brother ruins his best baseball card, Matt wants to “knock him flat.” Readers will identify with Matt's feelings and can help him choose a better way to handle his anger.

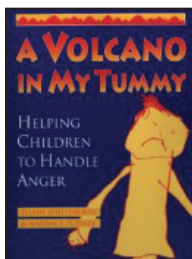
*I'm Scared*—Tracy is terrified of the new neighbor's dog and needs help deciding what to do about her feelings. Children learn several strategies for coping with fear in positive ways.

*I'm Excited*—Annie and Jesse are super-excited because it's their birthday. Young children will love helping the twins find activities to release their energy on this special day.

*I'm Mad*—When rain cancels a long-awaited picnic, Katie decides to be mad all day. Readers help her find other ways to express herself as she moves on to fill the afternoon with fun and laughter.

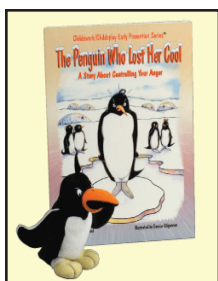
*I'm Frustrated*—Alex just can't seem to skate as well as his older brother and sister can, and he thinks about smashing his skates. Readers help Alex find better ways to express his frustration and find other fun things to do.

*I'm Proud*—Mandy learns to tie her shoes, but no one seems very excited. Children learn to deal with put-downs by choosing from a multitude of options to help Mandy value her own achievements.



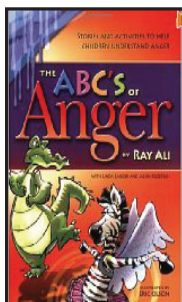
Whitehouse, E., & Pudney, W. (1998). *A volcano in my tummy: Helping children to handle anger*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

(Ages 6–13) This accessible little book is designed to help children and adults alike understand and deal with children's anger. Includes activities and information to help children understand and manage their anger, and to relate creatively and harmoniously with the people around them.



Sobel, M., & Gilgannon, D. (2000). *The penguin who lost her cool: A story about controlling your anger*. Childswork/Childsplay Early Prevention Series™. Wilkes-Barre, PA: Childswork/Childsplay.

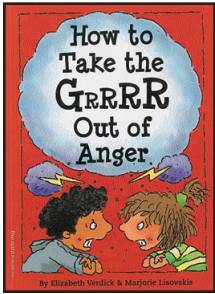
(Ages 3–8) Penelope Penguin is a good student, a great diver, and a terrific friend. But she frequently gets angry and can't seem to control her temper. In this charming and informative book, Penelope learns new anger control techniques that help her control her temper, achieve her goals, and keep her friends.



Ali, R. (2006). *The ABC's of anger: Stories and activities to help children understand anger*. Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates.

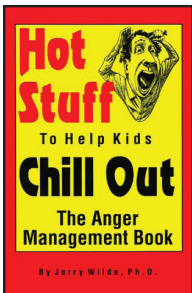
(Preschool–grade 3) Little children love stories, and this charming book presents 26 of them—one for each letter of the alphabet. In the first story, Anton Alligator shows readers what it's like to be angry. Next, Bertha Bear illustrates bullying. Then Carlos Camel demonstrates the fine art of chilling out. Continuing through the letter Z, these stories help youngsters understand anger and explore

appropriate responses to it. Younger children can have fun coloring the pictures, while older kids can add speech balloons. Each story is followed by discussion questions and related activities. This little book is a great introduction to anger management.



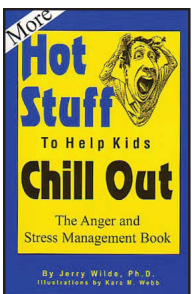
Verdick, E., & Lisovskis, M. (2003). *How to take the GRRRR out of anger*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

(Ages 8–12) With a user-friendly layout and whimsical illustrations, this little book gives kids: five steps to taming their tempers; six ways to solve anger problems; clues to anger “buttons” and “warning signs”; tips for using “anger radar”; and steps to take when grown-ups get angry. Also included are an Anger Pledge, a message to parents and teachers, and a helpful resource list.



Wilde, J. (1997). *Hot stuff to help kids chill out: The anger management book*. Richmond, IN: LGR Publishing.

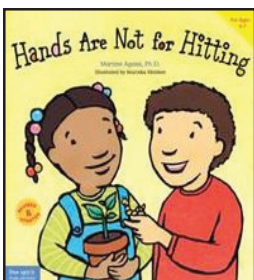
(Grades 4–12) This book is written directly for children. Humorous and challenging, this popular book invites kids to look at what causes their feelings of anger, change the way they think about it, and calm themselves down. Written in a brisk, conversational style that kids enjoy and understand, this little book really seems to work by giving youngsters the tools to solve anger problems on their own.



Wilde, J. (2000). *More hot stuff to help kids chill out: The anger and stress management book*. Richmond, IN: LGR Publishing.

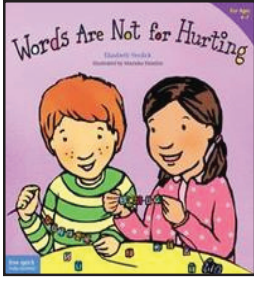
(Grades 4–12) This follow-up to the original *Hot Stuff* is written directly for children and describes ways in which anger can cause problems in their lives. Exercises in the books are designed to help children think clearly and be less hostile. This book also contains information on managing stress, which is an important part of any anger management program.

### **On Changing Problem Behaviors**



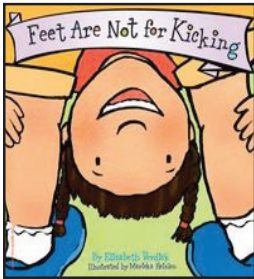
Agassi, M. (2000). *Hands are not for hitting*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

(Ages 4–7) Part of Free Spirit Publishing’s Best Behavior™ Series, this classic helps young children understand that violence is never okay, that they can manage their anger and other strong feelings, and that they’re capable of positive, loving actions. Made to be read aloud, *Hands Are Not for Hitting* also includes a special section for adults, with ideas for things to talk about and activities to do together.



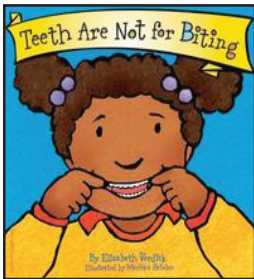
Verdick, E. (2004). *Words are not for hurting*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

(Ages 1–3 and 4–7) Part of Free Spirit Publishing’s Best Behavior™ Series, *Words Are Not for Hurting* helps toddlers and young children make the connection between hurtful words and feelings of anger, sadness, and regret, and teaches them to think before they speak, then choose what to say and how to say it. It includes activities and discussion starters that parents can use when working with children. (Available as a board book for toddlers.)



Verdick, E. (2004). *Feet are not for kicking*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.

(Ages 1–3) Part of Free Spirit Publishing’s Best Behavior™ Series, *Feet Are Not for Kicking* helps little ones learn to use their feet for fun, not in anger or frustration. This book also includes tips for parents and caregivers on how to help toddlers be sweet with their feet.



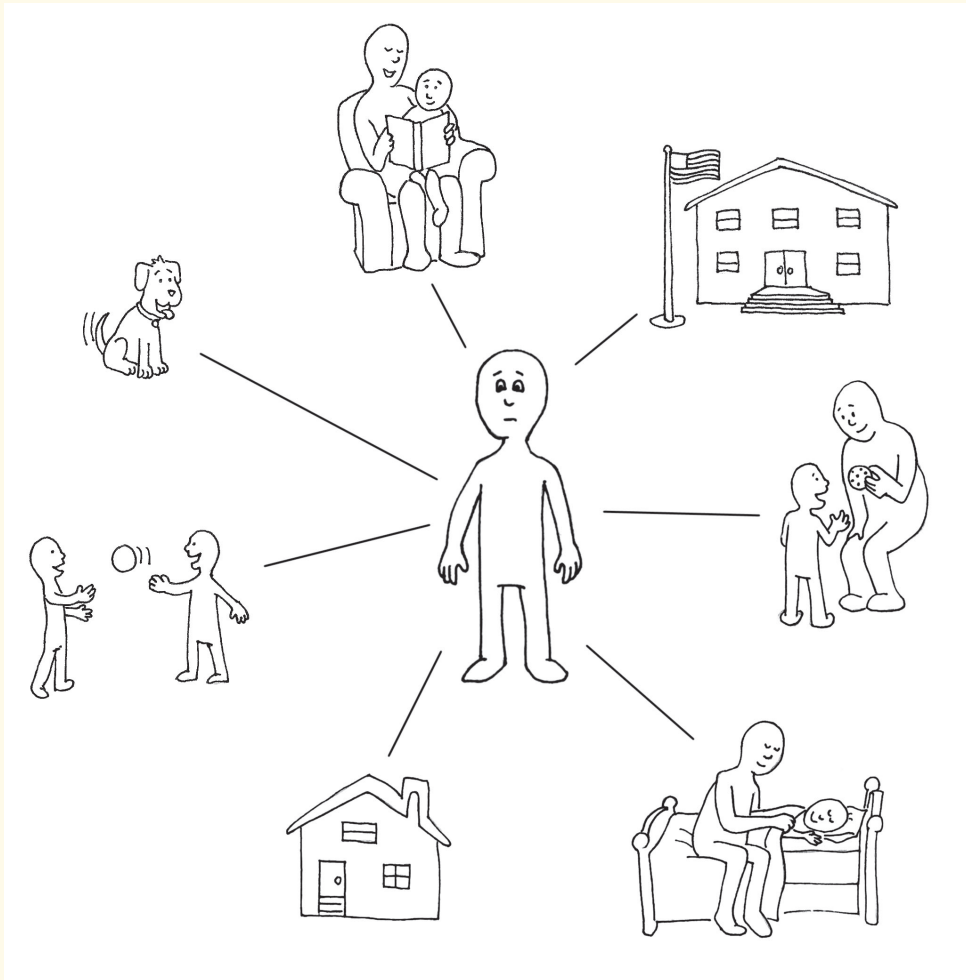
Verdick, E. (2003). *Teeth are not for biting*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.

(Ages 1–3) Part of Free Spirit Publishing’s Best Behavior™ Series, *Teeth Are Not for Biting* explores the reasons children might want to bite and suggests positive things children can do instead. This book also includes helpful tips for parents and caregivers.

Inclusion of any item on this list is not an endorsement of any product by the NCTSN. Product descriptions are based on information provided by the publisher or manufacturer, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the NCTSN.







Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

# Module 6: Connections and Healing



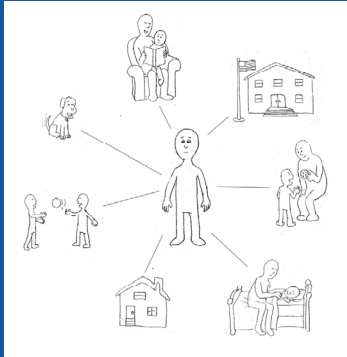
## Learning Objectives

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After completing this module, you should be able to:

- Identify at least three important connections in your child's life, and ways in which you can support and maintain these connections.
- Describe how trauma can affect children's view of themselves and their future.
- List at least three ways in which you can help your child feel safe when talking about trauma.





# Module 6: Connections and Healing

Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

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*When you feel connected to something,  
that connection immediately gives you a  
purpose for living.*

—Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

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## What keeps you connected?



- Relationships
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Co-workers
- Life Stories – Past, Present, Future
  - Personal
  - Family
  - Cultural
- Places, things, rituals, and practices

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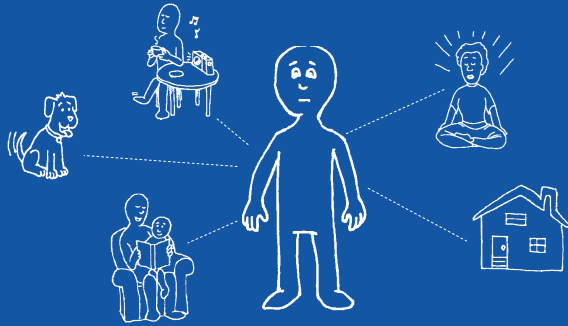
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## Name Your Connections . . . (Group Activity)



(Continued)

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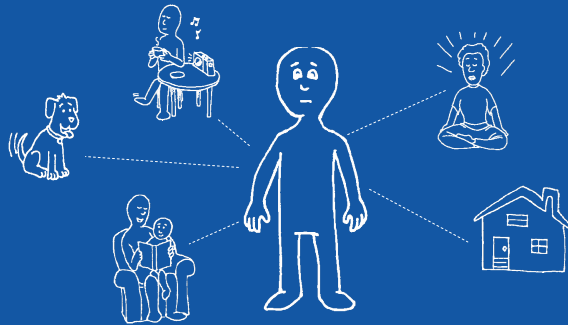
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## Name Your Connections . . . (Continued)



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## Children Define Themselves Through Their Connections



- Who am I?
- What is lovable about me?
- What am I capable of?
- How can I survive and make sense out of what's happened to me?
- Who will I be in the future?

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*Being taken from my parents didn't bother me . . . but being torn away from my brothers and sisters . . . they were my whole life.*

*It was probably the most painful thing in the world. They told me I would be able to see them a lot, but I was lucky to see them at all.*

—Luis

Hochman, et al. (2004). *Foster care: Voices from the inside*. Washington, DC: Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Available at <http://pewfostercare.org/research/voices/voices-complete.pdf>.

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## Essential Elements 5 and 6



5. Respect and support positive, stable, and enduring relationships in the life of your child.
6. Help your child develop a strength-based understanding of his or her life story.

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## A Family Tale



- **Joey** (four), **Sandy** (nine), and **John** (14) have been in foster care for six months.
- The children were taken into care after their mother, **Jane**, left Joey and Sandy alone for several days while she went on an alcohol and cocaine binge.
- Joey is with **Thelma**, their maternal grandmother. Sandy and John are with **Rana**, a foster mom.

(Continued)

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- Jane's father was an alcoholic who was sometimes violent
- Children often saw Jane passed out on the floor
- Once when Jane was passed out and bleeding from a head injury, Sandy feared she was dead
- Children witnessed violent fights between their parents
- Their father left two years ago without saying good-bye

*(Continued)*

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- Jane has had periods of sobriety and many relapses.
- Sober for the last five weeks, Jane called the children every Thursday night and visited them every Sunday.
- On each visit, Jane told the children, "We will all be together again soon."

*(Continued)*

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- **Joey** misses and worries about his mother. Is nervous and clingy just before her calls. Asks when he is going to see "my Sandy" over and over again.
- **Sandy** remembers having fun with her mother when she wasn't "loaded." Has nightmares about her mother passed out on the floor. Angry at her father for leaving and wonders if he is dead.
- **John** was close to his father. Blames his mother for the split. Doesn't trust women. Feels "old enough" to be on his own.

*(Continued)*

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



On Thursday, Jane didn't call.

- What might each of the family members feel and think?
- How might they behave?
- How might their past trauma and Invisible Suitcases influence their reactions?

*(Continued)*

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- **Joey:** worried, clingy, focused on how he would give Jane a present on Sunday
- **Sandy:** upset and angry, argued with Rana about going to the Sunday visit
- **John:** withdrawn, said he didn't care about Jane
- **Thelma:** worried, angry, ashamed; remembered her husband's drunken nights
- **Rana:** worried but judgmental

*(Continued)*

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## A Family Tale *(Continued)*



- On Sunday, Jane didn't show up for the visit.
- **Joey** threw a tantrum, insisting his mother would come.
- **Sandy** became upset and angry, tried to protect Joey, and lashed out at Thelma and Rana.
- **John** acted withdrawn and disinterested, but lashed out at Rana and Sandy in the car on the way home.

*(Continued)*

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## What can be done? (Group Activity)



- How can Rana and Thelma help the children cope with Jane's behavior and maintain healthy connections?
- How can they help themselves?

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## What about Jane? (Group Activity)



### Trauma is intergenerational

- Grew up with an alcoholic and sometimes violent father
- History of abusive relationships
- Repeatedly tried to quit drugs and alcohol
- Loves her children even as she seems to "fail" them

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## Lessons from Joey, Sandy, and John (Group Activity)



- Every child in a family has a unique relationship with his or her parents and siblings.
- Even children with the same trauma history will understand those events differently. They may have different trauma reminders and react differently to them.
- Caregivers must take care not to burden children with their own strong and complicated feelings toward birth parents.

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**Let's take a break!**

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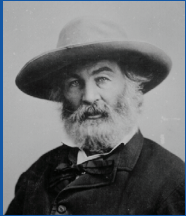
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*It takes two to speak the truth.  
One to speak, and another to hear.*

—Walt Whitman

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### **Making It Safe to Talk**



- Makes the “unmentionable” mentionable
- Reinforces the message that the child is not responsible for the trauma
- Provides an opportunity to correct mistaken beliefs
- Teaches children that trauma does not have to define their lives

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**Harry:** *I just feel so angry all the time. . . . What if after everything I've been through, something's gone wrong inside me? What if I'm becoming bad?*

**Sirius:** *I want you to listen to me very carefully, Harry. You're not a bad person. You're a very good person who bad things have happened to.*

*From Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (Warner Brothers, 2007)*

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## Talking About Trauma



- Expect the unexpected.
- Be aware of your reactions.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Be ready to listen and talk openly with your child, rather than avoiding the topic.

*(Continued)*

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## Talking About Trauma *(Continued)*



- Stop what you are doing and make eye contact.
- Listen quietly.
- Provide simple, encouraging remarks in a calm tone of voice.
- Avoid "shutting down" the child.

*(Continued)*

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## Talking About Trauma *(Continued)* (Group Activity)



- Offer comfort without being unrealistic.
- Praise the child's efforts to tell what happened.
- Provide constructive feedback.
  - Focus on the *behavior* of the caregiver, rather than making judgments.
- Be ready to share information with the child's therapist, and to report abuse or neglect that has not yet been reported.

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## Building New Connections



Build connections across the disruptions in your child's life:

- Document positive events and experiences (photos, scrapbooks, journals, etc.).
- Help "reconstruct" past experiences.
- Encourage your child to look forward to future goals and dreams.

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## Helping Your Child (Group Activity)



Think about the child in your My Child Worksheet. How can you help this child. . . :

- Feel safe when talking about trauma?
- Build connections across disruptions?
- Look positively towards the future?

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## Module 6: Wrap Up

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NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network



## **Module 6**

### ***Supplemental Handouts***





## Module 6: Connections and Healing

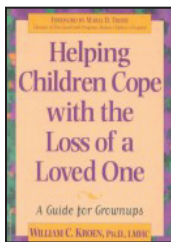
### Additional Resources

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#### Books and Publications for Resource Parents

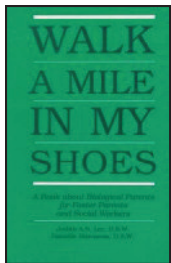
*Rise* (<http://www.risemagazine.org/index.html>)

Written by and for parents in the child welfare system, *Rise* helps birth parents to advocate for themselves and their children, and can help resource parents better understand the difficulties—and strengths—of their children’s birth families.



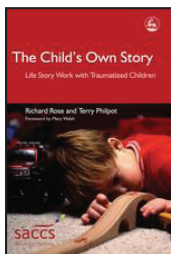
Kroen, W. C. (1996). *Helping children cope with the loss of a loved one: A guide for grownups*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Comfort, compassion, and sound advice are offered to anyone helping a child cope with the death of a loved one. Specific strategies are suggested to guide and support children of all ages.



Lee, J. A., & Nisivoccia, D. (1989). *Walk a mile in my shoes: A book about biological parents for foster parents and social workers*. Mt. Morris, IL: Child Welfare League of America Press.

This book can help foster parents and caseworkers “get into the shoes” of birth parents. Agencies will find it especially effective for use in the training of caseworkers and foster parents and for use by teachers and students in learning about birth families.



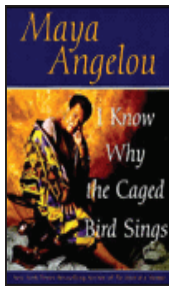
Rose, R., & Philpott, T. (2005). *The child’s own story: Life story work with traumatized children*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This book provides a detailed introduction to life story work and how it can help children recover from trauma and make sense of the disruptions in their lives. It includes information on how to get needed information on your child’s life.

#### Books and Publications for Children

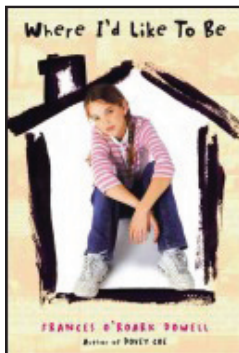
*Represent* (<http://www.youthcomm.org/Publications/FCYU.htm>)

(Teenagers) Written by and for young people in the foster care system, *Represent* provides an inside look at how teens cope with life “in the system.” This bimonthly magazine is an invaluable resource for any adult seeking to understand young people in care.



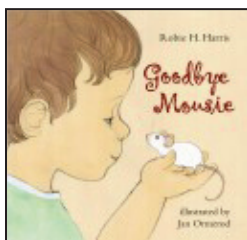
Angelou, M. (1997). *I know why the caged bird sings*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

(Grades 10–12) *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the story of acclaimed poet Maya Angelou's life from birth to young adulthood. Shuffled between homes with her best friend and brother, Bailey, eight-year-old Maya was physically and emotionally devastated when her mother's boyfriend raped her. She shut herself off to the world, speaking only to Bailey, until a kind and loving teacher pulled her out of her silence.



Dowell, F. O. (2003). *Where I'd like to be*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

(Pre-teens and teens) A ghost saved two-year-old Maddie's life when she was an infant, her Granny Lane claims, so Maddie must always remember that she is special. But it's hard to feel special when you're shuttled from one foster home to another. Now that she's at the East Tennessee Children's Home, Maddie keeps looking for a place to call home. She even makes a "book of houses," where she glues pictures of places she wants to live. Then a new girl, Murphy, shows up at the Home armed with tales about exotic travels, being able to fly, and boys who recite poetry to wild horses. Maddie shows Murphy her beloved scrapbook, never anticipating that this one gesture will challenge her very ideas of what home and family are all about.



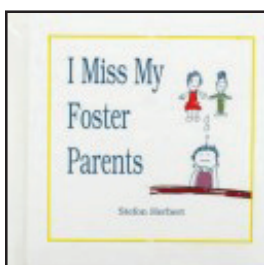
Harris, R. H. (2001). *Goodbye mousie*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.

(Ages 4–8) When a child learns that his pet mouse has died, at first he can't believe it. But it takes time for the young narrator to understand that Mousie is dead and he's not coming back. Beautifully told and illustrated, *Goodbye Mousie* is a perfect book with which to help children cope with loss.



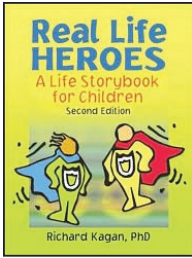
Holmes, M., & Mudlaff, S. J. (2000). *A terrible thing happened: A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 4–8) This gently told and tenderly illustrated story is for children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode, including physical abuse, school or gang violence, accidents, homicide, suicide, and natural disasters such as floods or fire. An afterword for parents and other caregivers offers suggestions for helping traumatized children, including a list of other additional resources.



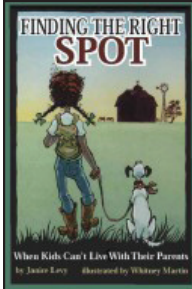
Herbert, S. (1991). *I miss my foster parents*. Mt. Morris, IL: Child Welfare League of America Press.

(Ages 4–8) Seven-year-old Stefon describes the fear and anxiety he feels when he and his sister leave their foster home and go to live with their new adoptive family. This realistic and honest book may help other children feel that they are not alone in missing their foster parents and depicts the relationship continuing with phone calls, cards, and visits.



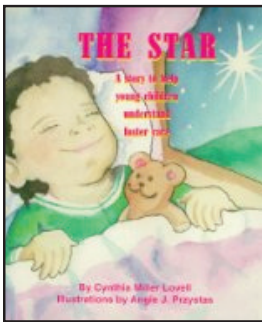
Kagan, R. (2004). *Real life heroes: A life storybook for children (2nd ed.)*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

(Ages 6–12) Designed for use by children who are receiving trauma-informed psychotherapy, this book helps children move from painful or fractured memories to a positive perspective by drawing strength from the supportive people in their lives. It encourages children to work with caring adults to develop autobiographies through a wide range of activities, including drawings, music, movies, and narrative.



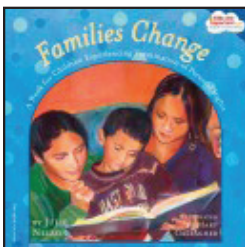
Levy, J. (2004). *Finding the right spot: When kids can't live with their parents*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

(Ages 6–12) A young girl living with her foster parent describes the ups and downs of being separated from her mother and living in unfamiliar surroundings. A story for all kids who can't live with their parents, regardless of the circumstances, it tells about resilience and loyalty, and love, sadness, and anger, too. A “Note to Caregivers” discusses the emotional experience of children who are in foster care, kinship care, or otherwise not living with their parents, and the vital support that the adults in their lives can offer.



Lovell, C. M. (1999). *The star: A story to help young children understand foster care*. Battle Creek, MI: Roger Owen Rossman.

(Ages 4–8) *The Star* follows a fictional young girl, Kit, who is taken from her mother to the safety, and different world, of a foster home. On Kit's first night in foster care, she becomes friends with a star outside her bedroom window. The star tells Kit about other foster children it has seen. Through the story, the star is a source of comfort for Kit as she experiences many emotions and adjusts to all the new things in her foster home.



Nelson, J., & Nelson, J. (2006). *Families change: A book for children experiencing termination of parental rights (Kids Are Important series)*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publications.

All families change over time. Sometimes a baby is born or a grown-up gets married. And sometimes a child gets a new foster parent or a new adopted mom or dad. Children need to know it's not their fault. They need to understand that they can remember and value their birth family and love their new family, too. Straightforward words and full-color illustrations offer hope and support for children facing or experiencing change. Includes resources and information for birth parents, foster parents, social workers, counselors, and teachers.



Ottenweiler, J. (1991). *Please tell!: A child's story about sexual abuse*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Foundation.

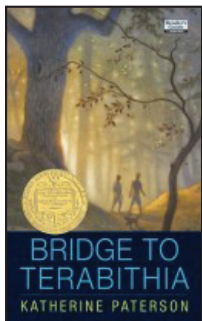
(Ages 9–12) Nine-year-old Jessie's words and illustrations help other sexually abused children know that they're not alone, that it's okay to talk about their feelings, and that the abuse wasn't their fault. *Please Tell!* is an excellent

tool for therapists, counselors, child protection workers, teachers, and parents dealing with children affected by sexual abuse. Simple, direct, and from the heart, Jessie gives children the permission and the courage to deal with sexual abuse.



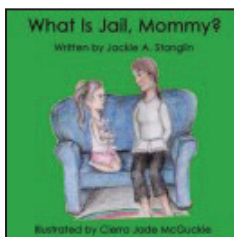
Paterson, K. (1987). *The great Gilly Hopkins*. New York: NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

(Pre-teens and teens) Eleven-year-old Gilly has been stuck in more foster families than she can remember, and she's disliked them all. She has a reputation for being brash, brilliant, and completely unmanageable. So when she's sent to live with the Trotters—the strangest family yet—Gilly decides to put her sharp mind to work. She devises an elaborate scheme to get her real mother to come rescue her. But the rescue doesn't work out, and Gilly is left thinking that maybe life with the Trotters wasn't so bad.



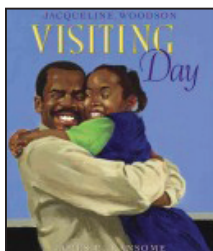
Porter, K. (2005). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: NY: HarperCollins.

(Juvenile) Jess Aarons' greatest ambition is to be the fastest runner in his grade. But on the first day of school, a new girl boldly crosses over to the boys' side and outruns everyone. That's not a very promising beginning for a friendship, but Jess and Leslie Burke become inseparable. Together they create Terabithia, a magical kingdom in the woods where the two of them reign as king and queen, and their imaginations set the only limits. Then one morning a terrible tragedy occurs. Only when Jess is able to come to grips with this tragedy does he finally understand the strength and courage Leslie has given him.



Stanglin, J. A. (2006). *What is jail, Mommy?* Centennial, CO: LifeVest Publishing, Inc.

(Ages 4–8) This book was inspired by a much-loved five-year-old girl whose father has been incarcerated for most of her life. One day after visiting with friends who have both devoted parents in the home, this little girl blurted out to her mother in frustration, “What is jail anyway, and why can't Daddy be home with us?” *What Is Jail, Mommy?* not only explains why the parent is incarcerated but what his or her life is like as an inmate.



Woodson, J., & Ransome, J. (2002). *Visiting day*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

(Ages 6–8) As a little girl and her grandmother get ready for visiting day, her father, who adores her, is getting ready, too. The community of families who take the long bus ride upstate to visit loved ones in prison share hope and give comfort to each other. Love knows no boundaries, and here is a story of strong families who understand the meaning of unconditional love.

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