



fostering **FUTURES**

No. 8 - Issue 8 - October 2009

Time Is Money



Need a ride to the doctor? Someone to braid your daughter's hair? A break from the challenges of parenting? Help with yard work? No problem. The Rhode Island TimeBanks Initiative can help. Started by the Parent Support Network, the RI TimeBanks Initiative is a unique program that provides the perfect solution for today's parents who often lack the time, money or talent to tackle their to-do-list.

how it works

A TimeBank is simply a community of people who support each other. When you provide one hour to do something for an individual or group, you earn a Time Dollar. Then you can use that Time Dollar to receive an hour of a neighbor's time or engage in a group activity offered by a neighbor. Hour by hour, TimeBank members earn credits they can exchange for services from other members.

For example, you may be a talented musician. How about offering music lessons to earn Time Dollars? Then you can exchange your Time Dollars for something you need, like car rides to medical appointments. The possibilities are endless and the sense of community is rewarding.

time for respite

Laurie Tapozada, TimeBanks Coordinator at the Parent Support Network is especially excited about how the initiative can help foster parents find respite. She acknowledges that in Rhode Island gaining access to quality respite services is not always easy. This is where timebanking can help. The RI Foster Parents Association, Parent Support Network of RI, and Adoption RI are working to build a quality respite program for biological, foster and adoptive families. This unique program will be built on a TimeBanks model and designed to create natural networks.

"In our respite program, providers will earn Time Dollars for providing respite. Respite providers may be other foster/adoptive families or community providers. We will offer comprehensive training, matching, monitoring and support services to families and respite providers in the program," Tapozada explains.



valuable connections

While timebanking will certainly help with your 'to-do' list, its true value is in building community connections. "The most valuable exchanges are the many that result in long-term friendships," explains Stephanie Rearick, a TimeBanks Director in Wisconsin. More than 22,000 hours have been officially exchanged in WI so far and people are building long-lasting relationships. "People are really getting to know each other and to understand more about other people's life situations," explains Rearick. "Many TimeBank members have greatly improved their quality of life by getting to know more people and gaining access to services. Organizations that participate are developing connections with other organizations and individuals in the community, fostering more cooperation and sharing of resources. The TimeBank helps us all to be more aware of the resources available locally and to use our resources more efficiently."¹

get started today

The RI TimeBanks Initiative already has 110 members and exchanging Time Dollars is just the tip of the iceberg. You'll also have access to great programs. For example, "Lunch and Learn" sessions address stress management and healthy living. Yoga classes are held every Wednesday. Spanish classes start in October.

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Rhode Island Foster Parents Association

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association is a verb

If you look up “association” in the dictionary, you’ll find the following definition: NOUN (1) an organization of people with a common purpose and a formal structure. (2) friendship; companionship. (3) connection.

To some extent the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association fits this definition. Yes, we are an organization of people. Yes, we have a common purpose and formal structure. Yes, we promote friendship, companionship and connections. Nevertheless, we prefer to think of our association as a VERB, rather than a noun.

Let us explain the difference. Put simply a noun is “a person, place, or thing.” If you view association as a noun, it is simply a name. It doesn’t have life. It doesn’t act.

Now take a moment to think of association as a verb – an action. This subtle shift means you are no longer just part of a group; you are part of an action. Think about it. Making connections. Building friendships. Advocating for at-risk youth. These are all actions.

Although you can benefit from RIFPA just by belonging, in order to truly connect and grow you have to put in action. Whether you are going to a workshop, attending a conference, calling your mentor, or reading *Fostering Futures*...action is key.

We know that action takes time and it’s hard to think about adding workshops, seminars and support groups to your crazy schedule. We promise if you start making the time, it *will* change how you feel. Don’t believe us? Then check out our interview on page 8 with Pat Lengyel a veteran foster parent and a firm believer in action! Do you want to take a class, but are just too busy? Make your well-being a priority and just do it! Do you long for help with car rides, music lessons, hair care and more? Read our cover article and learn about how Time Banking can help.

Finally, take some time to read our October issue and take action. You and the many children in care will be glad you did.

Sincerely,



Lisa Guillette
Executive Director

our mission:

The mission of the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association is to provide education and other forms of support to families that provide substitute care, and to the community at large, in order to further the cause of children who cannot live with their parents.

Rhode Island Foster Parents Association Board of Directors

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Executive Director



Ways to connect with RIFPA

10

Volunteer to sort clothes at our storage unit

9

Attend the CT Association of Foster & Adoptive Parents' Conference at the Mohegan Sun

8

Offer to help with the Holiday Gift Campaign

7

Become a Real Connections Mentor for older youth in care

6

Write an article or send a tip to Fostering Futures

5

Schedule an appointment with an elected official to talk about the importance of foster care

4

Go to www.timebanks.org and join the RI TimeBank

3

Help organize donations of clothes & baby gear for the storage unit

2

Read the newsletter... see you are connecting already!

1

Call RIFPA and ask how you can volunteer your time & talent



continued from cover

If you are ready to join this supportive community simply call the RI TimeBanks Initiative at 401.467.6855. You can also sign up online at:

www.timebanks.org

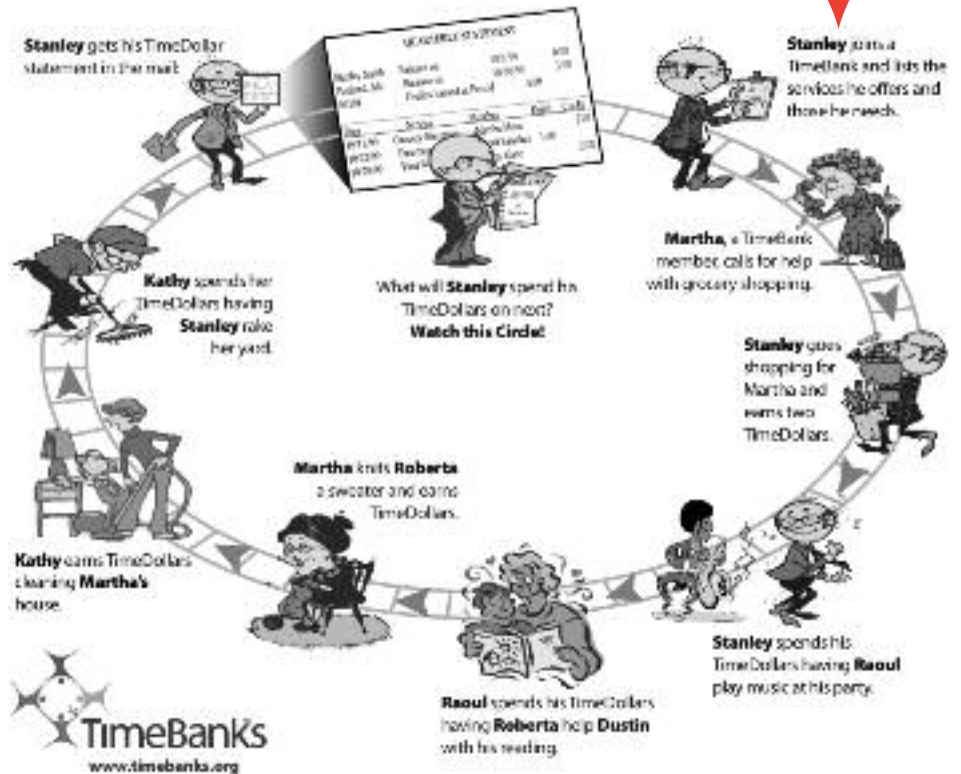
Just scroll down to the "The RI TimeBanks Initiative" and click "Join". You'll be asked to enter some information and then a TimeBanks Coordinator will call you within a day or two. The membership process includes an enrollment application, three references and a background check. You'll have a brief orientation and then you are ready to go.

Let's support each other – one hour at a time.

¹www.fortemadison.com/live/article?id=160

Circle of Caring

Start Here



Reprinted from www.timebanks.org



5 Core Values of Time Banking

Have you ever wished you had someone around to give you a ride somewhere, help you run some errands, pick you up after you've dropped your car off for repairs, or just give you a hand when you need it? Someone you really trust?

Many of us have friends, neighbors and family members who help us out, but they can't always be there in a pinch. In a Time Banking community, someone is always there when you need them.

It is like having an extended family to help out—with rides to the doctor, trips to the supermarket, help with the yard, chores around the house or childcare.

With Time Banking, sharing gifts means building trust.

Time Banking honors the unique gifts, talents and resources that each of us has to share, regardless of age, employment or ethnic background — such as tutoring, yard work, simple repairs, running errands, and storytelling. It's labor with love.

TimeBanks exist to promote exchanges that honor five core values:

1 assets

We are all assets.

Every human being has something to contribute.

2 redefining work

Some work is beyond price.

Work has to be redefined to value whatever it takes to raise healthy children, build strong families, revitalize neighborhoods, make democracy work, advance social justice, make the planet sustainable. That kind of work needs to be honored, recorded and rewarded.

3 reciprocity

Helping works better as a two-way street.

The question: "How can I help you?" needs to change so we ask: "How can we help each other build the world we both will live in?"



4 social networks

We need each other.

Networks are stronger than individuals. People helping each other reweave communities of support, strength and trust. Community is built upon sinking roots, building trust, creating networks. Special relationships are built on commitment.

5 respect

Every human being matters.

Respect underlies freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and everything we value. Respect supplies the heart and soul of democracy. When respect is denied to anyone, we all are injured. We must respect where people are in the moment, not where we hope they will be at some future point.

Reprinted from www.timebanks.org/five-core-values.htm



"Time Banking turns strangers into friends."



H1N1

Emergency Management Plan



WHAT?

Help Rhode Island develop a mass email list, mass text list, and phone trees in order to prepare for the upcoming flu-season

WHO?

ALL FOSTER PARENTS

HOW?

Call Linda at the Association (401.438.3900 x100) with your name, cell phone number and email address

WHEN?

TODAY!

Site of the Month

Child & Family WebGuide

Expert Reviewed Sites on Children & Families

www.cfw.tufts.edu/

What is the WebGuide?

The WebGuide is a directory that evaluates, describes and provides links to hundreds of sites containing child development research and practical advice.

Topics are selected on the basis of parent recommendations; they cover all ages, from early child development through adolescence. Online searches for many parent topics yield information that is inconsistent with child development research. The WebGuide selects sites that have the highest quality child development research and that are parent friendly.

Over 1,800 Families Will See Your Ad

Do you have a product or service that directly relates to children and families? Advertising in Fostering Futures gives you a unique opportunity to reach a world of parents, families and caregivers who need to know about your business today!

Our newsletter is published monthly by the Association and is mailed to over 1,800 households throughout Rhode Island. In addition, each issue is emailed to 600 state employees.

Your ad will get noticed and you'll be helping to ensure the quality of this publication for Rhode Island's foster families.

Contact Kara Duffin at kara.duffin@comcast.net for details.



parent news

How To Survive Your Oppositional Child's Behavior

November 13 from 9:30am – 2:00pm
Mohegan Sun Convention Center - Uncasville, CT

Children who employ oppositional and defiant behaviors are attempting to catch the significant adults in their lives in relationship traps. These children typically act out of a sense of frustration over loss of control of their lives. To compensate for this, they extend an invitation to the significant adults in their life via relationship traps. It is important for us as adults not to fall victim to these traps and not to employ the 7 “No-solutions” (solutions that don't work). The oppositional behaviors that will be discussed are: Finding loopholes, Let's make a deal, The need to have the last word, In your face rule violation, The cuz why child, Plays one parent against the other, The refusal to comply. Presented by the CT Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents.

Space is limited. Register by November 6 at www.cafap.com to reserve your seat! Conference registration includes one workshop session continental breakfast and a luncheon. Pre-registration fee is \$10.00 per person. Registration at the door is \$20.00 (space permitting).

Real Connections: Adult Mentor Training

November 18 from 6:30pm – 8:30pm
November 21 from 10:00am – 2:00pm

Please join us for our next two-day training session to learn about becoming a mentor to a teen in care.

Trainings held at the RI Foster Parents Association, East Providence. To register or for further questions, please contact Emily Buckbee at 401.438.3900 x103 or Emily.buckbee@rifpa.org.

Open House for Prospective Foster & Adoptive Parents

November 12 from 5:00pm – 7:00pm

Casey Family Services is hosting an open house for prospective foster and adoptive parents at its offices at 1268 Eddy Street, Providence. For more information, call 401.781.3669.

DCYF Adoption & Foster Care Information Night

October 28 from 6:30pm – 8:00pm at
DCYF Region 3 Office in North Kingstown

Do you have a lot of questions about adopting a RI child who is in state care? Are you trying to decide whether it's right for you? Would you like to begin the adoption process? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, please join us.

For more information, please call Robin Perez, DCYF Foster Parent Recruiter, at 401.528.3700.

Asperger's Disorder Support Group for Parents

November 9 from 7:30 pm – 9:00pm
Bradley Hospital, East Providence

This support group is for parents of adults or older children with Asperger's Disorder and related conditions. The group meets on the second Monday of each month during the school year in the Pine Room.

To register or for more information call Barbara Whalen at 401.333.1705.

Parents Helping Parents Support Group

November 12 from 6:30pm – 8:00pm
Bradley Hospital, East Providence

This support group has been formed to help parents and families cope with children that face emotional, behavioral or developmental disorders. Parents Helping Parents is free, open to the public and held on the second and fourth Thursday of each month. To register for the lecture, or for more information call Chris Brown at 401.432.1205.

Autism and PDD Support Group

Monday, November 30 from 7:00pm – 10:00pm
Newport Hospital

The autism and PDD support group meets in the Newport Hospital Gudoian Conference Room on the last Monday of each month. For more information, call Wendy Fourni at 401.683.6741.



Speaking of Kids: The Sleep and ADHD Connection

November 19 at 6:30 pm
Bradley Hospital, East Providence

This event is part of the Speaking of Kids lecture series. The goal of Speaking of Kids is to provide parents and caregivers with tools that can help them raise happy, healthy children. Each workshop is approximately two hours long with time allowed for audience questions.

The Speaking of Kids series is presented by Bradley Hospital and Hasbro Children's Hospital, and sponsored by Tufts Health Plan. Speaking of Kids programs are free and open to the public. All programs are handicapped accessible. To register, call the Lifespan Health Connection at 401.444.4800 or 1.800.927.1230.

Basic Rights in Special Education (Children & youth ages 3 to 21)

November 12 from 6:30pm – 8:30 pm

This workshop focuses on how to access special education and related services for children with disabilities. Participants will learn the laws that affect special education in RI and will receive an overview of parents' rights and responsibilities.

*Registration is required two weeks in advance. Details of location provided upon registration. To register, contact Suzanne Tobin at 401.727.4144 x123 or Tobin@ripin.org. RIPIN reserves the right to cancel workshops due to low registrations.

A Rhode Island Parent Information Network Workshop

ASPIRE Training Schedule

Take part in the ASPIRE Financial Literacy Training (formerly known as JCYOI), and upon completion youth 14-24 are eligible to receive up to \$1,000 a year in dollar for dollar matched savings toward approved purchases.

November 3, 10, 17, 24: Tuesdays from 4:00pm – 7:00pm

Trainings held at Providence Cranston Youth Center at One Reservoir Ave, Providence (Network RI Building). Youth must attend the 4 sequential training sessions in either month.

Referral forms can be found online at <http://www.rifpa.org/files/aspire-referral-form.pdf> or contact Tara Albury at 401.438.3900 x109.

Represent Teen Writing Contest

Represent is a national magazine written by and for young people in foster care. The magazine is written by a core staff of 30 teens in NYC. However, Represent also publishes stories, poems, and essays from teens across the country. Here is your chance to be heard and win cash! Any current or former foster youth age 21 or under can enter.

First Prize: \$150. Second Prize: \$100. Third Prize: \$50
Deadline: November 1, 2009

Represent Contest Question #98:

Imagine President Obama has chosen you to be his top adviser on foster care reform (improving the system). Write him a letter describing the three most important things that should be done to make foster care better, and why.

Fax or email your essay to: 212.279.8856 or Representmail@youthcomm.org.
Include your first and last name and address.

Submit Your Event

Our goal is to inform you of the best events, workshops, seminars, support groups and other opportunities for foster and adoptive families living in Rhode Island. Please help by sharing your event submissions. Listings are FREE. Please provide as much detail as possible. Please do not submit events publicizing a business-oriented sale. *Fostering Futures* reserves the right to edit events for length and/or content. We also reserve the right to refuse an event based on content or space limitations.

Email your listing to karaduffin@comcast.net
Deadline is the 1st of the month. For example, deadline for December issue is November 1.





Finding Balance Through Strong Connections: An Interview with Pat Lengyel

It's hard to believe Pat and Paul Lengyel stumbled onto foster care via a child specific placement in 1986. That step began twenty years of dedicated service. Since that day, Pat and her family have cared for over sixty youth. Her to-do list includes attending workshops, mentoring new foster parents and working as a DCYF Co-Trainer. Plus, she has four biological children, four adopted children, eight grandchildren and one on the way!

Fostering Futures (FF): What do you remember most about your first year as a foster parent?

Pat: That's easy. I remember how much I didn't know and how much information I didn't have. We started with a child specific placement so I had no skills, no knowledge, and no idea of what I could and couldn't do. I didn't realize that everyday activities like piercing ears, getting haircuts, and traveling were now regulated. I definitely learned through making mistakes – lots of mistakes!

FF: Did you have a foster parent mentor?

Pat: (laughs) I didn't even know any other foster parents. I wish I had a mentor to help me navigate the system. It would have been great to know how to access services, how to deal with court proceedings, how to build relationships with caseworkers – practical knowledge.

FF: What was your biggest challenge as a new foster parent?

Pat: The system can be very confusing and as a result it is hard to stay focused on what your role is. I didn't feel part of the team. Luckily, that has changed. Foster parents are more empowered. Partnership and teamwork are encouraged.

FF: How do you maintain balance and manage stress?

Pat: Information. I felt like we lived in our own world...our own little bubble. I was clueless and wanted to learn. My brain was like a sponge. I went to all trainings. I truly wanted to make

a difference and in order to do so, I needed more information. When you have information you feel in control. A light bulb goes off in your head when something stressful happens. You remember a class you took or another foster parent you spoke with and it helps you realize the challenge you are facing is normal.

FF: Can you tell us about your role in the Foster Parent Mentor Program?

Pat: In 1992 DCYF decided to pilot a Foster Parent Mentor Program and I was asked to be part of it. It took off! Foster parents were in need of extra support and the support they needed could only come from another foster parent. At first it was phone-based, now it has grown to include quarterly family and mentor get-togethers and in-person connections. The program is a positive step toward connecting foster parents facing similar challenges.

FF: Can you give a specific example of how a mentor can help a new foster parent?

Pat: Reunification. Many parents ask me how to prepare for a child leaving. I always tell them to start preparing the day the child moves into your home. After all, the goal is reunification. It also helps to reframe your thinking. I don't think of fostering as parents helping children. I think of fostering as families helping families.

FF: Why is connecting with other foster parents so important?

Pat: We face such unique challenges that only another foster parent could understand. Someone who is not a foster parent won't understand your heartbreak when a child leaves. They might say something like "You knew this would happen." or "Why do you do this?" Whereas another foster parent will cry with you and validate how you are feeling. I tell people the way you feel right now is not the way you will always feel. They can trust me because I know it to be true.

FF: If making connections and learning new skills help so much, why do so many workshops have low attendance?

Pat: I wish I knew the answer to that one! My guess is that people are busy. Years ago, when I did all the trainings, it was always the same 8-10 people who came.

Last month RIFPA hosted a Suicide Prevention Workshop and I was shocked that no one signed up! I once fostered a nine year old boy and found him in the closet with a belt on his neck wanting to die. I also had a severely depressed four year old who spent hours curled in a ball. Thankfully I had the knowledge, resources and connections to deal with those situations. I can't imagine the outcome otherwise.

FF: Do you have any suggestions for other foster families?

Pat: Get involved and support each other. Look for ways to expand your knowledge and connect. At the end of the day, being a foster parent comes down to being in relationships – with children, with families, with each other. We all know that successful relationships don't just happen. You get out of it what you put into it. It may seem hard at first, but give it a try!



dr. daycare

Dear Dr. Day Care,

When my husband and I first became foster parents our extended family was very supportive of the idea. They still respect our decision, but we have problems around family gatherings. My foster son can be very difficult and has ruined many family parties. As a result, my relatives do not want to include him anymore. We are feeling angry and alienated. Do you have any advice?

Signed,
Not Invited

Dear Not Invited,

Let me begin by saying you are not alone. This is a very common issue for foster families. It may help to remind yourself that holidays and big family gatherings can be challenging for all families. Here are some tips that may help you:

Talk to your relatives before the event. Be honest and let them know that you would like your entire family to be included. Perhaps you can give relatives a chance to meet your foster son beforehand in a smaller, less stressful setting. The more they get to know him, the more positive the relationship will be.

Set expectations. This will help everyone. Tell your foster son exactly what is expected of him. Role-play good manners and social skills. Make sure he knows the rules of good behavior and the consequences of not following them. His age will dictate the rules you set. For example, a younger child may have rules around sharing and playing nicely. Whereas, an older child's rules could focus on introducing himself, staying calm, and being respectful.

Follow through. Reassure relatives that your son has been given clear expectations about his behavior. Explain that your son knows if he does x, y or z that he will have to leave the party. Remind your relatives that you will monitor his behavior and are committed to following through if necessary.

Tip: You may want to take two cars, in the event one parent has to leave with your foster son.

Do a 'walk-through'. Talk to your foster son beforehand so he knows what to expect at the party. Let him know who will be there, what will take place, if it will be loud or quiet, crowded or intimate, etc. The more you prepare the better. Acknowledge his feelings. Let your relatives know that you realize your foster son can be difficult. Perhaps, you can carefully choose which family events offer the best chance at success. A small backyard birthday party for a relative may be more manageable than a formal wedding. Also, you can always plan a shorter visit. As the old saying goes, "Always leave the party when you are having fun."



Dr. Day Care is actually Mary Ann Shallcross Smith, Ed.D., owner of Dr. Day Care Enterprises which encompasses Kids Klub, Inc., Dr. Day Care's Child Development Center for Learning and Play, Comprehensive Child Care Services of Rhode Island, and Women's Business Talk Show. She is also co-founder of Child Care Connection.

Dr. Day Care welcomes your questions as they relate to child care. Please contact her at 1.877.333.1393 ext. 222 or email her at drdaycare@kidsklubri.com

Create empathy. While you cannot disclose the specifics of your foster son's past, you can help your relatives understand how he feels. Ask them to put themselves in his shoes. How would they feel being at a party with a strange family? Can they imagine having to live away from their parent(s)? You mentioned your family respects your decision; the goal is to get their support, too.

My final piece of advice is to give it time and take small steps. I know of one family who had twin boys that were not welcome at family events. One relative, who had a boy the same age, would refer to the family's foster sons as "animals." Since that time, the twins have been adopted, the boys are all friends and the relative happily baby-sits for them!



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many benefits!
1-800-459-6019**



We are proud to partner with DCYF
and the RI Foster Parents Association
in supporting foster parents and the
children in their care.





Sail Me Home

On August 27, the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association hosted its 7th Annual Cheeseburgers in Paradise Event at the Herreshoff Marine Museum Waterside Tent in Bristol. We are thrilled to announce that over \$35,000 was raised through the event for the Association and our Youth Enrichment Fund.

Guests lounge waterside savoring appetizers and a perfect sunset!



Event co-chair Linn Freedman and her husband Steve enjoy the evening!



Front row left to right: Lisa Paratore, Amy Doorley, Jennifer Massotti, Charise Perrett-Glasson

Back row left to right: Dave Paratore, Mark Doorley, Abby Klieman, Larry LaSala, Jeffrey Massotti, Jeffrey Glasson



Clockwise from top: Former foster youth presenters Kimberly Velasquez, Debra Criscione, and Sonia Wilcox join Executive Director Lisa Guillette for a photo-op.





SHARON O'KEEFE, ESQ.

(Former R.I. Assistant Child Advocate)

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Robin, Perez Recruitment	528.3700
Harden, Antonia (<i>Secretary</i>)	521.3483

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Secondary Trauma & Foster Parents:

Understanding its Impact & Taking Steps to Protect Them

Foster parents work daily, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with children who have been traumatized. They listen to their stories and feel their hurt. Empathy is often the most important tool foster parents bring to helping the children in their care. Unfortunately, the more empathic they are the greater their risk for internalizing the trauma of their foster children. The result of this engagement is secondary traumatic stress.

What is secondary traumatic stress? How is it the same and/or different from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

According to Dr. Charles Figley, author of *Compassion Fatigue, Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder*, secondary traumatic stress is “the natural consequent behaviors resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person”. Until recently, when we spoke about persons being traumatized we were speaking only of those people who were directly exposed to the trauma. We referred to their condition as post-traumatic stress disorder. Examples of such persons were Vietnam War veterans and/or victims of domestic violence.

In the last 15 years, we have come to recognize that people who work with, listen to, and try to help children and adults who have been traumatized are at risk for internalizing their trauma. This condition is called secondary traumatic stress. The only difference between post-traumatic stress disorder and secondary trauma is that with secondary trauma you are “a step away” from the trauma. The symptoms of primary or secondary trauma can be exactly the same!



“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

-Rachel Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

Why are foster parents at risk for developing secondary traumatic stress?

There are several reasons why foster parents are at risk for developing secondary trauma. Listed below are just a few of those reasons.

1) Empathy: Empathy is an important tool we use to help children and families who have been traumatized. Our clients, and children in particular, feel valued and heard when we empathize with them. However, if we over empathize or over-identify with our clients we place ourselves at risk of internalizing their trauma.

2) Insufficient Recovery Time: Foster parents often listen to their foster children describe some horrific events they have experienced. In addition, foster parents often hear the same or similar horror stories over and over again. With children in their home 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, they are often deprived of the “time off” they need to heal or to get some distance from what they have heard. Secondary trauma is cumulative, so listening to these stories over and over again can have a negative effect on even the most compassionate and resilient foster parents.

3) Unresolved Personal Trauma: Many foster parents have had some personal loss or even traumatic experience in their own life (e.g., loss of a family member, death of a close friend, physical or emotional abuse). To some extent, the pain of their own experience(s) can be “re-activated” when they hear the child describe a traumatic situation similar to the one they experienced. Unless the foster parent has healed from their own trauma they are at increased risk for internalizing the trauma of their foster child.

4) Children are the Most Vulnerable Members of Our Society: Young children are completely dependent on adults for their emotional and physical needs. When adults maltreat children, it evokes a strong reaction in any person who cares about children. As the primary caretakers for vulnerable children, foster parents are at increased risk for having a strong emotional reaction to what they hear and learn about from these children. The inability of the foster parents to change the situation can make them feel even more vulnerable (Figley, 1995).

(over)

How do you know if you are suffering from secondary traumatic stress?

One of the most difficult tasks for a foster parent is to recognize if they are suffering from secondary traumatic stress. Every person reacts differently and copes differently with their reaction to adversity. What one person finds helpful may not be helpful for another person and vice versa. All people must remember to call on the coping mechanisms that work best for them. There are, however, several “individual indicators of distress” which can tell us that we are at increased risk for developing secondary trauma. A key indicator is when you find yourself acting and feeling in ways that don’t feel normal to you. It is normal for all of us to have a range of emotions that include anger, sadness, depression or anxiety. However, when these emotions become more extreme or prolonged than usual, it is a potential indicator of distress (see table below).

When you begin to see or feel, in yourself, emotional or physical indicators of extreme distress, it is time to step back and evaluate yourself. Are there specific images or cases that keep coming into your head again and again? Are there situations with children that provoke anxiety that you are trying to avoid? Are there situations or people that remind you of a particularly distressing case? If you are experiencing some of these indicators, on a consistent basis, you should reach out and ask for help from another foster parent or from your caseworker. If the trauma symptoms become severe and last for more than a few days, you should consider seeing a therapist who specializes in trauma work.

emotional indicators

- Anger
- Sadness
- Prolonged grief
- Anxiety

physical indicators

- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Back aches
- Exhaustion

personal indicators

- Self-isolation
- Cynicism
- Mood swings
- Irritability

Self-Care Strategies for Combating Secondary Trauma Stress

Understanding your own needs and responding appropriately is of paramount importance in combating secondary traumatic stress. For foster parents it is critically important to find ways to “get a break” from parenting. To avoid feeling overwhelmed by feelings of frustration and sadness it is important to engage in activities you consider fun and playful. Any person working with maltreated or traumatized children needs to set aside time to rest, emotionally and physically, and to engage in activities that restore their sense of hope.

Remember, in the end, our ability to help children who have suffered depends upon our ability to care for ourselves... physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually, so we can be there for them when they need us.

Let me close by saying, in approaching your work please listen to the wisdom of the following passage by Marc Parent in his book, *Turning Stones: My Days and Nights with Children at Risk*.

“Rescuing one child from the harm of one night is glorious success. The evening is an opportunity to touch a life at a critical moment and make it better—not for a lifetime, not even for tomorrow, but for one moment. One moment—not to talk, but to act—not to change the world, but to make it better. It’s all that can be done and not only is that enough—that’s brilliant.”

About the Author

David Conrad has been a social worker for over 30 years. He has worked as a child protection caseworker and supervisor. He currently serves as a Senior Instructor with JFK Partners/Department of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, Colorado. To learn more about secondary trauma or to talk with him about providing secondary trauma training, please contact him at Conrad.David@tchden.org or at 303-861-6183.



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Foster Parent HelpLine

The Foster Parent HelpLine is a peer support service that is available statewide. It is staffed by foster parents who understand the issues and situations you face on a daily basis. Foster parents are encouraged to call the helpline with their questions or when they simply need someone to talk to.

**Call the Rhode Island Foster Parents Association's HelpLine:
1.800.655.7787**

Available 24 Hours. Your call will be confidential.
A service of the Mentor Program.

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