



## **Child Safety: Curricula for Staff and Foster Parents**

by Susan Dougherty

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When children are removed from their families and placed in foster homes, they should be protected from abuse by the state/agency in whose custody they live. It is the responsibility of the custodian to prevent abuse, but no system can ensure safety 100% of the time. For those instances in which abuse does occur, children should be able to report the occurrence and have action taken that will prevent reoccurrence.

What are the components that contribute to the creation of a safe environment for children in care, and an atmosphere that encourages children to openly report incidents of possible abuse?

Kendrick (1998) asserts that safeguarding children in care against abuse requires the following elements:

1. It must be simple for children to report abuse, and they must be listened to when they make a report. Children must have access to a person or to a telephone hotline to make reports, and they must feel confident that the report will not result in reprisals. Children should be given a voice in defining and promoting their rights and should have a role in complaint review procedures.
2. Staff and caregivers must be carefully recruited, selected, trained, supported and monitored.
3. Children in care should be part of a "rich social network" in the community that reduces the isolation that is often a factor in abuse.

In a discussion of the characteristics contributing to safety in a residential program, Daly and Dowd (1992) cite caregiver support, a model or system of care, a focus on positive behavior, a consumer orientation, training of caregivers, program evaluation, and an internal audit system.

We can look beyond out-of-home care: the same elements that contribute to the prevention of abuse in biological families can be applied to foster care, as well. Cameron

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and Vanderwoerd (1995) include the following among lessons to be considered in selecting and applying prevention measures:

- Successful preventive programs are characterized by multiple types of support and frequent contacts;
- Interventions such as counseling and skill training work better in combination than in isolation;
- Informal helping such as support groups and community networks are an important complement to formal programs, including education or training;
- Rapid response and intensive support are effective in times of crisis;
- Effective programs reduce barriers, both within the family and within the organization.

The Child Welfare League of America (2001) has issued guidelines that describe eight critical issues in the prevention of maltreatment in foster care. They are:

1. careful selection, preparation, and training of foster parents;
2. staff adequately trained to understand the stresses experienced by foster parents and provide support to ease those stresses;
3. preplacement assessment and matching of children and foster parents;
4. adequate levels of contact and monitoring of foster parents;
5. preparation of families and children for placement;
6. regular visits to children in care;
7. regular contacts with others who can observe and assess child well-being and safety; and
8. continuous quality improvement to strengthen services to children and families.

This paper focuses on one of these elements, the training of staff and caregivers. Training addresses maltreatment in out-of-home care from several different perspectives:

- Many children in care display behaviors that challenge their caregivers. Foster parents may be stressed by the pressure of trying to discipline children and youth who break house rules, if not laws. Staff must know how to help caregivers administer effective discipline that is not physically or emotionally abusive.
- At the same time, staff must be alert to early warning signs that abuse may occur.
- Staff and foster parents must be alert to peer abuse in foster homes.
- Some children act provocatively in reaction to prior sexual abuse. Caregivers and staff must be prepared for this and know how to respond in ways that are appropriate for the child while protecting themselves from the appearance of abuse.

- A large percent of children in care have been victimized in the past, often by their biological parents, but possibly also by other caregivers. Some have learned that making allegations of abuse may result in a change of placement or causing trouble for foster parents. Staff must be able to train caregivers in ways to protect themselves from false allegations.

The following curricula and materials address one or more of these issues.

### **Training for Staff on Preventing Abuse in Foster Care**

1. *Preventing Abuse in Foster Care* is a twenty-hour curriculum for staff. Subjects covered are:

- An overview of child maltreatment in family foster care
- Dynamics of abuse and neglect in family foster care
- Prevention points: Assessment and placement
- Monitoring: More prevention points
- The worker's educational role
- Working with the foster family in assessing and managing the child's behavior
- Adolescent abuse and neglect: Placement considerations
- Adolescent abuse and neglect: Identifying red flags and interviewing the adolescent
- Overview of child sexual abuse
- Child sexual abuse in family foster care.

McFadden, E.J. (1984). *Preventing abuse in foster care*. Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University.

Child and Family Publications

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### **Training for Caregivers on Providing a Safe Environment/Protecting Themselves Against False Allegations**

1. Foundations for Fostering pre-service training

In New Hampshire, training is delivered to caregivers through a University model provided by the Foster Care Training Partnership (College of Lifelong Learning in partnership with the Division for Children, Youth and Families). One module of this training is "Sexual Abuse and Safe Environments," which deals with the effects of sexual abuse on children and how it affects foster care placements. Included is

information on trauma, sexual acting out, house rules and boundaries, and tools to avoid allegations.

The Education and Training Partnership

College for Lifelong Learning

Dolloff Building

117 Pleasant Street

Concord, NH 03301

Phone: 603-271-6625

Fax: 603-271-4947

E-mail [etp@ccl.edu](mailto:etp@ccl.edu)

Website: <http://www.cll.edu/about/etp/fff.htm>

## 2. Preventative Practice Training

Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA)

This training acknowledges both that abuse can and does occur in foster homes, and that false allegations are made, and is nonjudgmental. The facilitator's guide addresses issues such as confidentiality and encouraging participation but letting participants "pass" if they are uncomfortable. Exercises are included that encourage foster parents to apply what they are learning to their own experiences and children they have fostered. There is a strong emphasis on prevention by being prepared, and planning ahead.

For additional information, contact:

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Fax: 515-289-2080

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## Materials for Staff on Assessing Child Safety

1. *Assessing Child Safety in Foster Homes* (booklet): detailed advice on how administrators can determine whether or not children are safe in their foster homes and how to detect instances of abuse. Part of the Foster Care Information Series

Boys Town Press

14100 Crawford St

Boys Town, NE 68010

Phone: 800-282-6657

Website: <https://www.girlsandboystown.org>

## Training and Materials for Working with Difficult Behaviors

1. The Spaulding Institute offers a training entitled *Working with the Sexually Abused in Foster Care and Adoptive Placements*.  
For more information, contact:  
Jean Niemann  
Phone: 248-443-7080, ext 301  
Email: [njiemann@spaulding.org](mailto:njiemann@spaulding.org)
2. *Managing Sexual Acting Out Behavior* is a videotape that describes how to set up a safe environment for children, including adolescents, and offers specific techniques for dealing with sexual acting out. It is addressed to foster and adoptive parents and to trainers.  
For more information, contact:  
Independent Living Resources, Inc.  
411 Andrews Road, Suite 230  
Durham, NC 27705  
Phone: 800-820-0001  
Fax: 919-384-0338  
Email: [info@ilrinc.com](mailto:info@ilrinc.com)  
Website: <https://www.ilrinc.com/fostermain.htm>
3. *Behavior Crisis Management* is a curriculum and train-the-trainer course presented by the National Resource Center for Youth Services. It focuses on managing behavioral crises, beginning with prevention and continuing through interventions once behavior occurs. Issues in foster parenting are specifically addressed.  
For more information, contact:  
National Resource Center for Youth Services  
University of Oklahoma  
4502 E. 41st Street, Building 4 West  
Tulsa, OK 74135.  
Phone: 918-660-3700  
Fax: 918-660-3737  
Website: [http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/tot\\_bcmt\\_r.html](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/tot_bcmt_r.html)
4. Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) training is available from the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University. This is a crisis prevention and intervention model and includes an assessment of an agency's current crisis prevention and management system, train-the-trainer sessions, ongoing technical assistance, and a final evaluation.  
For additional information, contact:  
Martha Holden or Eugene Saville

The Residential Child Care Project  
Family Life Development Center  
Surge 1  
Ithaca, New York 14850  
Phone: 607-254-6414  
Website: <http://rccp.cornell.edu/>

### **Training and Materials on Peer Abuse in Foster Care**

1. Materials from Toni Cavanagh Johnson include three booklets:
  - *Investigating Allegations Of Sexual Behavior Between Children In Residential Settings*, 7 pp.
  - *Investigating Allegations of Sexual Behavior Between Children For CPS Workers In The Field*, 6 pp.
  - *Responding To Children's Sexual Behaviors in Residential Settings*, 6 pp.

For more information, contact:

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Email: [toni@tcavjohn.com](mailto:toni@tcavjohn.com)  
Website: <http://www.tcavjohn.com/orderform.htm>

### **Materials for Assessing Personal**

1. The Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Murray A. Straus can be used to help staff or foster parents examine their personal beliefs about discipline as well as to screen for child maltreatment. A number of papers about this scale and its uses is available on Dr. Straus's website. For more information, contact:  
Murray A. Straus, Professor of Sociology and Co-Director  
Family Research Laboratory  
University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824  
Phone: 603-862-2594  
Fax: 603-862-1122  
Email: [murray.straus@unh.edu](mailto:murray.straus@unh.edu)  
Website: <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2>

## References

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