

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

July / August 2022

N F A P A

WHY KIDS FALL APART AFTER SCHOOL AND HOW TO HELP

Shira and Jed get reports from school that their 4-year-old, Eva, is a superstar in the classroom. She is cooperative, empathetic, and a great helper. She is kind to her friends and is good at sharing. However, Eva's self-control seems to run out when she gets home, ignoring her parents' requests and having meltdowns.

This experience of kids being well-behaved at school and showing more difficult behavior at home is actually very common. While it feels confusing, it can help to look at things through your child's eyes. Here are some ways to think about what your child is experiencing and how to help.

How do children feel at school and home?

School is stressful. But it's positive stress! Think of all the tasks and new skills children do during the school day: follow directions, handle transitions, deal with frustrations and disappointments (like when Daniel Tiger didn't get to be the line leader!). This is a lot to manage for a young child whose brain is in the early stages of development. By the time they get home, they are exhausted and have little energy left to self-regulate. Plus, this year there is the COVID-19 effect. Returning to school after such a long hiatus and after so much change has made this transition back to school tough for many kids. The energy it has taken for them to make yet another big transition is bound to put them over the edge at home.

School tends to be more structured than home. In order to

run a safe and calm classroom, teachers have many rules and boundaries. This lets the kids know exactly what to expect: enter class, put a backpack in cubby, sit in a circle, put the blocks in size order on the shelf, stop playing when the lights go on and off... and so on. The expectations are clear and children know what to expect, which is comforting to children and helps them prepare for following the rules.



Young children know home is their safest place. Many of us are our best selves at work. We manage our emotions, we are cooperative, and we communicate with respect. Then we get home and dump all of our stress onto the people we care about and love the most. While this may not be healthy, and something many of us need to work on, we feel free to do this because we know our family will accept us and be there for us. The same is true for kids. Home is their safe space. It is because they trust you that they are free to fall apart with family.

Young children are testing out different roles. Because home is their safe space, it is

also where kids are able to express themselves in ways they may not feel comfortable doing at school. Take 5-year-old Junie, who is very obedient at school. She puts others' needs ahead of her own. At home, Junie feels freer to test out her power, to be more assertive. It may be in ways that are not acceptable, like demanding that her mom only read to her and not her little sister, but that's where setting loving limits come in.

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Call NFAPA at 877-257-0176 or 402-476-2273.

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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Corinne@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JulyAugust2022>

We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. True or False. Avoid making negative comparisons between your child's behavior at home and school.
2. True or False Letting go of important limits ultimately leads to less powers struggles and therefore more stress for all.
3. Fill in the Blanks. Kids in foster care also often have _____ and building new relationships
4. True or False. Kids who are in foster care are more likely to be disciplined at school than other kids.
5. List 5 things you do and say when your child comes to you broken hearted and feeling as though their world is crumbling?
6. True or False. Friendship at this age is intense and sometimes fiery, conflict tends to be short-lived.
7. List what seven signs of anxiety in children are.
8. True or False. Anxiety becomes a problem for children when it does not get in the way of their everyday life.
9. Fill in the Blank. _____ or _____ can also cause excessive crying in teenagers.
10. True or False. If there is a specific problem, fear, and frustration triggering the tears, help you teen work towards a solution.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

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How can you help?

Don't take it personally. Your child isn't being defiant on purpose. They are just having a hard time coping. What your child needs in their difficult moments is for you to be their rock — to acknowledge they're having a hard time and to show them you can tolerate their distress. When your child says, "I am never going to wash my hands before dinner," you might respond: "I know you don't want to stop playing, but it's time to get ready for dinner. You have two great choices: you can pick any sink to wash your hands, or I can be a helper and use a wipe to get them clean before dinner." Most important is that you don't get drawn into a power struggle, which only increases stress.

Acknowledge and show empathy for how hard your child is working to be a good citizen at school. "We know it takes a lot of energy to follow all the rules, make so many transitions from one activity to another, and share and take turns with friends. That's a lot! By the time you get home, I bet you are really tired, which makes it hard to follow the rules at home. We understand."

Avoid making negative comparisons between your child's behavior at home and school. Instead of: "Ms. Tiffany says you are the best helper and listener at school. Why can't you do that at home?" Think: "You are doing such a great job following directions and being a good friend at school! That's awesome. Now Mommy and Daddy are going to work on how to help you follow directions at home, too. We know you can do it." Building on the positive leads to more cooperation.

Include time for connection when you're back together. While this may seem impossible when trying to get through the nightly routine, the payoff can be big. Filling your child's (and your) cup after a long day apart can result in less overall stress and more cooperation. Making it a ritual is even better, like reading a chapter of a book as you cuddle together. Connection is about the quality of the interaction, not the amount of time spent. When kids can count on this ritual, it can reduce stress for everyone and result in more cooperation. If your child is out of sorts and not ready to reconnect when you get home, give them time and space. Create a cozy corner in your home where they can go to relax until they're ready to engage. Let them show you when they're ready to connect.

Maintain important limits. Boundaries are even more important for kids when they are spiraling out of control. Letting go of important limits ultimately leads to more power struggles and therefore more stress for all. Think: "I know it's hard to say goodnight and you don't like that there is a limit on books at bedtime. But our rule is three stories and then lights out. I can't wait to see you in the morning." You can fill your child's cup while also setting limits. These are not mutually exclusive. It is not love or limits. Limits are loving.

Keep in mind that if your child is thriving in a group setting, you should be giving yourself a good, strong pat on the back.

It means you have given them the tools to get along in the real world: being flexible, patient, listening to others, and coping when things go wrong. These are all skills children need to have to be effective in a group and that you have instilled in your child.

Author: Claire Lerner, LCSW-C is a child development specialist and author of *Why Is My Child In Charge?* For over 30 years, Claire has been partnering with parents to help them understand their young children's behavior and development and to solve their most vexing childrearing challenges. She also provides consultation and training to local preschools and pediatric residents. In addition, Claire is the author and creator of hundreds of resources for parents and professionals that translate the science of early childhood for into practical tools for promoting children's healthiest development.

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FOSTER CARE, SPECIAL EDUCATION, AND LEARNING AND THINKING DIFFERENCES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

By Trynia Kaufman, MS

Working closely with the school is key to getting the best help for kids with learning and thinking differences. But if you're a foster parent, that can be difficult.

Foster parents don't have the same legal rights as biological or adoptive parents. So, you may be limited in how involved you can be with the school, and in how much you can advocate for your foster child.

But even with these limitations, you can still play a vital role in helping your foster child work on challenges. Read on to learn more about foster care and learning and thinking differences.

Legal Rights in the Special Education Process

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the federal special education law. It gives biological and adoptive parents certain rights, starting with the right to participate in their child's special education. Under the law, they are presumed to be the primary decision makers for their child. That means schools must try to involve them.

That's true even if their child is in foster care. Parents have these rights even if they live in another state or can't travel

to the school. It's also not unheard of for parents to call in to school meetings by phone from prison to participate.

As a result, foster parents often have few rights. Depending on the state they live in, foster parents may not even have the right to know if their foster child has been identified by the school as having a learning or thinking difference.

It's also not clear whether foster parents have the right to view school records. Some legal experts think that child welfare agencies can release the records to foster parents under FERPA. Others think that biological or adoptive parents must give their consent first.

Here are some of the things foster parents may not have the legal rights to do:

- Sign educational forms

- Consent to evaluations and services

- Request an evaluation

- Attend evaluation or IEP team meetings (unless the child's parents say it's OK)

All this can change if the biological or adoptive parents have lost or given up their parental rights through court order. Or if they can't be located or won't respond after repeated attempts to contact.

In these cases, IDEA allows others, like foster parents, to serve as the educational decision maker for the child.

That decision might be made by the school or a court. Foster parents can then take steps to be involved in the child's special education. That includes going to IEP meetings and signing consent for evaluations.



If the foster parent doesn't want that role, the school or the state may appoint someone else. That person might be a relative, mentor or someone from an approved list. (A lot of this can vary depending on state laws regarding special education and foster parents' contracts. So it's important to check what those laws say about your rights.)

Foster parents may not have the same rights as biological or adoptive parents. But they often have valuable information to share with the school. Many schools look to foster parents

to learn more about the child. Sometimes, the biological or adoptive parents may ask for foster parents to be more involved, as well.

If you have a foster child in the special education process, it's important to ask the school about what your rights are.

Finding Out About Learning Challenges

The information available to foster parents can be very limited. If the child welfare agency does not provide you with school records, you may not know how much your foster child struggles in school, or why. But you still may be able to get an idea of the challenges in other ways.

First, your foster child might tell you and share what's happening at school. You can also ask direct questions like:

“Are you having a hard time in school?”

“Are you getting help at school?”

“Do you have shorter homework assignments than the other kids in class?”

There are certain behaviors that might be signs of learning and thinking differences, too. Your foster child might say things like “I'm dumb” or “I can't do it.” You might see signs of anxiety about school, such as your foster child refusing to go to school or frequently complaining of stomachaches or headaches in order to stay home.

You might get an indication from teachers, too. The teacher might tell you that your foster child has a hard time in class and describe the difficulties. In that case, you can ask if the teacher could recommend strategies to help your foster child at home. (Learn more about how to decode teacher comments for signs of learning and thinking differences.)

A child and family team (CFT) meeting is a good place to ask questions about your foster child's challenges in school. These meetings might also be called family team meetings or family group decision-making meetings. They're run by your state's child welfare agency.

CFT meetings include parents, other family members, social workers, foster parents and people in the family's support network. You might also want to ask if the biological or adoptive parents would allow you to see school records and attend IEP meetings or any disciplinary meetings.

The sooner you know that your foster child has learning and thinking differences, the sooner you can provide support at home.

Risks and Protections for Kids in Foster Care

Foster care and problems at school are closely linked. Data show that kids in foster care are at greater risk of having learning and thinking differences. They're also less likely to graduate from high school than kids who aren't in foster care—whether or not they have learning and thinking differences.

Many kids who enter foster care have slipped through the cracks at school. It's often not until they're in the foster care system that they're identified as eligible for special education. By then, they've lost valuable time for intervention and special

education supports and services.

Being in the foster care system can create disruptions that can cause kids to fall further behind. Transferring schools is known to set students back as much as six months academically. Missing school or transferring to a new school can be especially hard for kids in foster care who have learning and thinking differences. Here's why:

It takes time for teachers to learn what supports each child needs. And it takes time for kids to learn what is expected of them at a new school.

Schools don't always teach the same information at the same time. The new school might expect students to already know something that your foster child wasn't taught at the previous school.

Kids in foster care also often have a harder time trusting adults and building new relationships.

High school students have the added risk of losing their credits if they transfer in the middle of the year.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers some protections for students in foster care who are switching schools. Under ESSA:

Students are allowed to stay in their original school if it's in the child's best interest.

Schools must work with the child welfare agency on a transportation plan for students in foster care.

Schools must immediately enroll kids who are in foster care even if they don't have paperwork or documentation. The school can make the request for records from the previous school.

If the child has an IEP, the new school must provide comparable services to the child's current IEP. The school can develop a new IEP or can have the IEP transferred from the previous school.

Emotional Issues and School Discipline

Trauma is common for kids in foster care. It might be the result of abuse or neglect, or of being separated from their parents. Kids who have experienced trauma may act out both in and out of school. Having learning and thinking differences can create even more anxiety and negative behavior.

Kids who are in foster care are more likely to be disciplined at school than other students. So are kids with learning and thinking differences. They sometimes act out when they don't think they can do what's being asked of them.

Here are some ways you can help:

Allow your foster child to express feelings, even if they're intense. Try to remain calm. Remember that it's normal for kids in foster care to be upset or angry. This is especially true when a child has been placed in a new foster home.

Talk with your foster child about social and emotional issues.

Talk to teachers about your foster child's home situation. If teachers know that a child is going through a hard time, they can provide more supports at school. They may also give more

leeway and be more understanding.

Observe and take notes on your foster child's behavior. Share them with the school. Also share any specific challenges your child expresses about schoolwork, assignments and coping with life at school.

Understanding Learning and Thinking Differences

Many learning and thinking differences run in families. So, it's sometimes easier for biological parents to understand their child's challenges than it is for foster parents. The more you know about learning and thinking differences, the easier it will be for you to help and support your foster child at home.

Get basic facts about learning and thinking differences. Experience what it's like to have learning and thinking differences by using our Through Your Child's Eyes tool. And watch as an expert talks about what to do when you and your child don't "get" each other.



Key takeaways

Even though foster parents aren't covered under IDEA, it's important to check your state's laws relating to special education.

As a foster parent, you have valuable information to share with the school.

Talk with teachers about specific challenges your foster child expresses about schoolwork, assignments and coping with life at school.

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<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/foster-care-special-education-and-learning-and-thinking-differences-what-you-need-to-know>

HOW TO RESPOND TO YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDSHIP PROBLEMS

by Linda Stade

Children's friendship problems can be overwhelming for them. Here's how we can respond in a helpful manner.

Your daughter comes home from school and her heart is broken. Her best friends have told her they don't want her to come to the sleepover they have planned for the weekend. Or your son sees on Snapchat that all his mates are at the skate park without him. To your child, time has stopped and the colour has seeped out of the world. They feel physically sick.

For an adolescent, friendships are incredibly important, often akin to love affairs. In them, they find an identity and a place in their newly-emerging, social network. Often they share their deepest secrets and their greatest joys. Every emotion is magnified. Naturally, when something goes wrong it can feel devastating.

So what do you do and say when your child comes to you broken-hearted and feeling as though their world is crumbling?

1. LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGING OR FIXING

The first thing you need to do is remove yourself from any distractions, sit with your child and give them your complete attention. Don't interrupt, or cluck or cry or give agitated body language. Just listen quietly until they have told you the whole story, from beginning to end. Listen without judgment and without trying to fix it.

Comfort your child and validate their feelings, "You were the only one not invited, no wonder you're upset". There is nothing wrong with crying so don't feel as though you have to toughen them up. Crying is an effective and healthy way of regulating emotions.

Make sure you have a complete understanding of their perception of what happened. Remember that it is perception. When we recount events we always filter the story with our own emphasis. I'm not saying your child is lying but there is what happens and what we make it mean. There is their side of the story and the other sides.

2. EMPOWER INSTEAD OF CATASTROPHISING

How you respond at this point is important. If you react strongly you make the incident into a catastrophe. You may feel like wringing someone's neck, but you can't say that. Don't vilify the other party, they are likely to end up friends again, plus....don't vilify people, your child is learning from you.

You may want to wrap your child in your arms and sob, you can't do that either. When you overreact you create fear in your child. They start to question their self-worth and your faith in them.

Your child will be looking very carefully for your reaction, so show them that you believe in them. Send the message that



you think they can handle this. Bad things have happened before and 100% of the time they have survived. Let them know how loved they are and that fact will never change.

3. DISTRACT FROM FRIENDSHIP PROBLEMS

Now is the time to distract, not with light, colour, and action, but with the comfortable and familiar routines of home. Don't let them dwell. Home is a sanctuary, let it be that way. Kids draw energy and power from the familiar and from safety. They need you to act normally. Don't pretend that nothing has happened, but stay on track.

Don't loosen boundaries to compensate for what is happening at school. For example, don't encourage your child to sleep with you or avoid sporting commitments. Normality is important. If everything is good and normal at home, the rest of the world can be conquered.

4. PRESS PAUSE

The temptation now is to call the parents of the other children or rush down to the school. You feel distressed and you think that taking action will make that feeling go away. That's normal and understandable... but don't. Wait. Stop and sleep on it. You're right, it may help you escape your negative feelings, but it won't necessarily help your child.

When you rush out and try to solve the problem for your child two things definitely happen:

You disempower your child. They already feel their social power has been taken. You can't now take away their individual power.

You take away their opportunity to grow. Hurts like this one will happen countless times in their life, help them to be prepared. Kids who are supported in resolving their own conflicts develop a sense of their own competence in this area. They believe they are capable.

Sometimes making those calls or going up to school will make things worse. So just take a breath.

5. PROBLEM-SOLVE TOGETHER WHEN EVERYONE IS CALM

When your child is calm and has had plenty of time to move out of their big emotions, then it's time to talk. As tempting as it will be to tell your child how to handle the situation, try not to. If you want them to grow into an adult who can make good decisions and act instead of purely reacting, you have to allow them to practise. So guide, but don't take over. Obviously, the younger the child, the more guiding you will have to do. Be aware, there is no instant fix, but you can help your child navigate the drama.

First and foremost, your child needs to decide whether they want to fix the friendship or not. Unhealthy, unhappy friendships shouldn't be maintained. Maybe new friends are the answer. Your child needs to ask him/herself some important questions.

WHAT IF IT DOESN'T BLOW OVER?

Friendship at this age is intense and sometimes fiery, but conflict tends to be short-lived. In most cases, these upsetting incidents will be resolved fairly quickly by themselves. That said, if the incident is not short-lived, or constitutes bullying, then you do need to work in partnership with the school.

FINALLY...

Talking to your kids about friendship is really important, not just when things are going badly. Teach kids to recognise what makes a good friend. When things are going well ask them what they like about their friends and what they like about themselves when they are around those people. You can download my FREE activity guide Talking To Your Kids About Friendship.

Expose them to a large variety of potential friends in lots of different contexts. And encourage them to have a lot of different friends for all the different aspects of their lives. Adolescents change a lot and so do their friends. Emotional literacy in this hugely impacting sphere of their lives is essential.

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<https://lindastade.com/childrens-friendship-problems/>

WHY IS MY TEENAGER CRYING ALL THE TIME?

For teens, everything feels more intense, whether it's good or bad. And crying can help a teen process and move through those emotions. Teenage crying isn't necessarily a warning sign. However, a teenager crying all the time, for no apparent reason, may be experiencing an underlying mental health disorder.

Because of harmful societal expectations about how boys and men should behave, teen girls often feel more comfortable

than boys expressing their emotions through crying. But just because a parent doesn't see their teenage son crying doesn't mean they're not experiencing sadness, loneliness, or other painful emotions.

Is It Normal for a Teenager to Cry Every Day?

A teenage son crying frequently or a teenage daughter crying all the time can be confusing for parents. "My teenage daughter cries every night" is a common concern parents bring to mental health professionals.

Teens crying about the hard things they go through is natural and healthy. In fact, if teens don't allow themselves to cry, they may instead express their emotions through anger and aggression, internalize them as self-judgment and self-criticism, or numb them with substance abuse or disordered eating.

But sometimes there's no obvious catalyst for a teenager crying. And they may be unwilling to talk about it, or may not even understand themselves what's triggering the tears. Consequently, "Why does my teenage daughter cry for no reason?" is another question therapists often field. Let's look at some of the reasons for a teenager crying all the time.

Causes of Teenage Crying

Why does a child cry all the time? For young children, crying is a way to express frustration, release emotional energy, and seek comfort. Kids that cry all the time often haven't yet learned to channel their emotions into words or how to think

NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

As Nebraska is opening up with changes due to COVID please contact the RFC in your area to see when support groups will be back up and running or continuing with an online support. Registration is required when meeting in person.

CONTACT A RESOURCE FAMILY CONSULTANT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Jolie Camden (Panhandle Area): 308-672-3658

- Virtual Support Group at this time. Available for all foster/adoptive parents on the first Tuesday at 6:30 pm (MT). Contact Jolie for Zoom information

Tammy Welker: 402-989-2197

- Virtual Support Group at this time. Available for all foster/adoptive parents on the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm (CT). No Support group during the summer. Contact Tammy for Zoom information or to offer support one on one.

Terry Robinson (Central): 402-460-9177

- One on one support or if you would like one started in your area, please contact Terry.

Robbi Blume: 402-853-1091

- FACES-Our online support group. Meets on Facebook Tuesday night at 9:00 pm (CT)

NFAPA Office: 402-476-2273

- Parenting Across Color Lines in Lincoln. Meets the 4th Monday of the month (RSVP required) at ConnectioN Point, 1333 N 33rd Street, Lincoln. Note: depending on COVID Risk Dial, it may go to a virtual meeting. Contact Felicia or the NFAPA Office for information or changes.



But what makes a teenager cry? There are numerous reasons for a teenager crying: losing a game, doing badly on a test, having an unrequited crush, fighting with parents, feeling alienated from peers, worrying about what's going on in the world, or simply releasing the everyday stress of being a teen. According to Tim Elmore, author of *Generation iY: Secrets to Connecting with Today's Teens & Young Adults in the Digital Age*, disappointment, fear, and feelings of inadequacy are three of the biggest reasons why kids and teens cry.

Moreover, many teens haven't yet developed the emotional regulation skills that support them to cope with what they're feeling. This is particularly true during early adolescence, when teens experience higher rates of mood variability between happiness, sadness, and anger. Research shows that the parts of the brain connected to emotion (the limbic system) react more strongly in teens than in either children or older adults. Meanwhile, the frontal cortex—the rational and calming part of the brain—isn't fully mature in adolescents.

Does a Teenager Crying All the Time Mean They're Depressed?

Neurobiology, in addition to the many inner and outer changes adolescents are going through, helps to explain teenage crying. But that doesn't mean parents can ignore a teenager crying all the time. Excessive crying in a teenager may indicate they are struggling with an underlying issue, such as adolescent depression. The ongoing feelings of sadness and

worthlessness associated with depression can prompt frequent crying spells with no single, identifiable cause. If this is the case, a teen will typically exhibit other signs of depression as well, such as problems with sleep, social withdrawal, lethargy, self-harm, and/or suicidal thoughts.

A crying teenager could also be suffering from an anxiety disorder. Shedding tears can be a way to release the overwhelming feelings of worry and dread that often accompany anxiety. In addition, teenage crying can be a sign of bipolar disorder, which encompasses extreme highs and lows. A teenage daughter crying all the time might be suffering from premenstrual dysphoric disorder, a severe form of PMS that affects a small percentage of women.

PTSD or traumatic grief can also cause excessive crying in a teenager. A teen's grieving process for a loved one, a breakup, or another significant loss may take time. Sometimes it takes more time than parents hope or expect. And teens may need professional support to process the loss, so they can move through it and find joy in life again.

"Grief is different for every person and every loss. It can last for weeks, months, or even years. This is why working with a mental health professional can be so important and beneficial in healing." —Michael Roeske, PsyD, Newport Academy Executive Director

How to Help a Crying Teenager

Witnessing a teenager crying all the time is extremely difficult for a parent. It's natural for parents to feel frustration and helplessness along with concern for their child. Here are some ways to take supportive action.

Give them tools to head off the stress that can lead to frequent crying spells. Stress-relief strategies, like breathing exercises, progressive relaxation, exercise, and reframing negative thoughts, can make a big positive difference.

Make sure they get enough sleep. Sleep deprivation in teens has been shown to significantly decrease their levels of happiness and reduce their ability to manage difficult emotions.

Let them know that crying is a natural and cathartic way to express and release emotions. Stigma and shame around crying—which particularly impacts boys—can increase a teen's discomfort and embarrassment about their tearfulness. And trying to hold back the tears, rather than allowing themselves to cry openly, can actually increase a teen's crying frequency and intensity.

Encourage them to work through their emotions using creative expression, such as journaling, writing songs, dancing, or making visual art.

If there is a specific problem, fear, or frustration triggering the tears, help your teen work toward a solution. Trying to have a rational conversation with a crying teenager may not be useful. But once they're calmer, talk about what happened to prompt the emotions. Even if there's nothing that can be "fixed," simply acknowledging and validating the issue will help your teen feel supported.

Get a mental health assessment. A high percentage of adolescents are struggling with anxiety, depression, and collective trauma right now. If you have concerns about



your child's well-being, reach out for professional support immediately.

Treatment for Teen Depression and Trauma

A clinical professional can help determine whether a teenager crying all the time is a symptom of a mental health disorder. The next step is to determine what level of care a teen and family need. Treatment can help address an adolescent's underlying conditions while guiding them to strengthen their emotional regulation and executive functioning.

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HOW TO SPOT SIGNS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

By Harset Tekin

Learn about the warning signs of worry and stress in kids so that you can step in to offer support

Anxiety is simply an activation in our nervous system that we also call the fight or flight response. It warns us against imminent physical danger, such as a car coming towards you as you are crossing the road, or when perceived psychological danger, such as a big exam, is approaching.

Some childhood anxieties can be completely age-appropriate. For example, very young children, under three years old, may have separation anxiety – they may cry when separated from their parents or carer, and become clingy. Some children, particularly preschoolers, may develop fears such as being scared of the dark, or not wanting to use the toilet seat. And school-aged children may feel anxious, particularly if they are in a new situation or a new environment – such as when starting at a new school, or before a presentation or exam. These are all part of their normal daily life, and it's OK to feel this way.

But, anxiety becomes a problem for children when it starts to get in the way of their everyday life. This might present as them refusing to go to school, or starting to experience psychosomatic symptoms like headaches and stomach aches, or beginning to avoid big events.

You may notice some changes in your child's behaviors recently, and are wondering whether your child is experiencing anxiety or not. You might be asking what the signs of anxiety in children are, and how can you support them? Here, we explore some common signs to watch out for.

1. Excessive anxiety and worry

Your child may lack the confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges. If this is the case, and you know a change such as a house move is coming up, prepare your child by talking to them about what is going to happen and why.

2. Inability to control fear or worry

Having a lot of negative thoughts, or constantly thinking that bad things are going to happen to them, starting to avoid everyday activities, and having overly high expectations for their schoolwork, homework, and sports performance can be signs that they're not able to control their worries. Try not to become overprotective or anxious yourself. Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking three deep, slow breaths – breathing in for a count of three, and out for three.

3. Restlessness

Constantly fidgeting or squirming can be an external sign of anxiety. Having some sensory or fidget toys may help your child to calm their minds, and redirect their energy, and there are plenty of different options available to purchase easily online.

4. Agitation and irritability

Anxious children may become irritable, tearful, or clingy – or have angry outbursts, including tantrums and crying. Reassure them and show them that you understand how they feel. As well as talking to your child about their worries and anxiety, it's important to help them find solutions. Teach your child to recognize signs of anxiety in themselves.

5. Sleep disruption

Having difficulty sleeping, waking in the night, starting to wet the bed, having bad dreams, and difficulty settling down for bed can all be signals of anxiety. Children of all ages find routines reassuring, so try to stick to regular daily routines where possible. Worry jars are particularly helpful for children, where they can write down on paper anything that's worrying them, and put these thoughts into a jar. Pinterest has a lot of creative ideas on this. Then you go through the papers/worries together at the end of the day or week.

6. Somatic symptoms

Anxiety can often come with physical, somatic symptoms, such as headaches, stomach aches, and muscle tension. If your

child is old enough, it may help to explain the physical effects anxiety has on our bodies. It could also be useful to describe anxiety as being like a wave that builds up, and then ebbs away again.

7. Avoidance

Refusing to go to school, meltdowns before school about minor things such as clothing, hair, or shoes, and meltdowns after school about homework are things to watch out for. Encourage your child to manage their anxiety and ask for help when they need it. If your child is anxious because of distressing events, such as a bereavement or separation, look for books or films that will help them to understand their emotions.

If your child's anxiety is severe, persists, and interferes with their everyday life, it's a good idea to get some help. A visit to a GP is a good place to start. If your child's anxiety is affecting their school life, it would be worth talking to their school as well.

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https://happiful.com/how-to-spot-signs-of-anxiety-in-children/?fbclid=IwAR1DqMdgflX9I0HPfRW2DfLbSvAM-upSPP2i7KM2zDuXo_kEF8Zv6m3lbyc

'DON'T WORRY, LITTLE



MAN. I'VE GOT YOU,' I WHISPERED. HIS AMAZING BROWN EYES LOCKED ONTO MINE.': FOSTER DAD'S 'KNEES HIT THE PAVEMENT, SOBBING' AFTER SON RETURNED HOME, 'I COULD STILL HEAR HIM SCREAMING'

Author: Jordan Shea

"My wife and I were foster parents for a city close to our home. It was my idea and my heartstrings were pulled the hardest. We went into it together and with our eyes wide open... or so we thought.

It took almost 8 months to get our license and another 2 months to get our first placement. We had said yes to an earlier call, but a jurisdictional issue arose, and that child was placed elsewhere.

On a Thursday afternoon shortly before Christmas, our social worker called.

'Would you guys be interested in a 15-month-old boy with medical issues?'

I nearly choked and stammered out, 'H-h-hang out lemme call Emily!'

I got her on the phone, she said yes, then I said yes and then we patched our worker back in. We said yes, we were sure. She told us he was likely being removed the next day and she'd call us that morning with some updates and confirmation.

We went home and nested. Hard. I made and remade the crib, shuffled toys around, put the car seat together and shoved it into my car and the other seat into my wife's truck. We didn't know who would be picking him up, so we needed to be prepared. I rummaged through our stash of clothes and got out what I thought would be the right size. I packed a diaper bag and put it in my wife's truck, but (naively) didn't put one in mine.

I had to take more than the regular dose to get any sleep that night and the next morning/day of work wasn't much better. I was frantic all day long, constantly checking my phone and my email. After about a dozen phone calls, we finally heard that he was being taken to social services to get picked up.

My wife was occupied, so I jumped into action. The sun was already going down by the time I got into my car and snow was starting to fall. Let me just tell you, our city is NOT prepared for snow. At all. People start to drive insanely bad almost immediately.

Getting to this beige, intimidating building took what felt like forever. I pulled into the garage downstairs, snagged the

make-shift diaper bag I had packed from a run to a dollar store



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▶ **July 9, 2022-Trying Differently Rather than Harder**
9:00-11:00 CT—Virtual

Why do we parents keep using strategies with our children that aren't working? I did for way too long and once I shifted my approach, we had more peace and calm in our family. Through some funny stories, we will explore non-consequence-based approaches, and learn how to try differently, rather than harder, in order to bring more calm into our homes.

Presented by Barb Clark from North American Council on Adoptable Children

2-hours of in-service credit

▶ **September 10, 2022-Just Keep Swimming: Thriving in the midst of Grief and Loss** 9:00-11:00 CT—Virtual

While there is beauty in loving and caring for children in an adoptive, foster or kinship family, there are also various levels of grief and loss. We feel emptiness when a child moves on to another placement or is reunified, sadness when we see how trauma experiences have impacted their lives, and grief when we realize our kids' developmental differences might not allow for typical development. It is important to figure out ways to work through grief and loss without getting stuck in the seaweed. We must learn to "just keep swimming."

Presented by Barb Clark from North American Council on Adoptable Children

2-hours of in-service credit

You must register to attend! We will send you the Zoom link to log in.

Registration closes the day before training.

Questions? Contact the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association at
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and headed inside.

I was ushered into a large cube farm and a very tall man turned around, holding a beautiful, dark-skinned little boy in his arms. The toddler was completely passed out, wearing a too-small onesie with a printed tie on it and too-short pants. I took him into my arms and the moment his skin touched mine felt like electricity flowing through my entire body.

I didn't care that I didn't know him 5 minutes ago. I didn't care that he smelled like cigarettes. I didn't care that I didn't know what color his eyes were or what his voice would sound like or what his last name was.

In a split second, this 15-month-old stranger became part of me. The entire focus of my world shifted and at the center of it all was him.

I stumbled into a chair, cradling this (rather heavy) sleeping toddler in my arms and managed to quickly sign paperwork without waking him up. As I prepared to leave, they handed me a gigantic coat and I clumsily covered him in it as I walked out of the office.

I rode down the elevator with the social worker, who opened the door to the parking garage for me and said, 'Good luck!' before I could even turn around to acknowledge and thank her.

At the car, I shrugged the coat off of him and carefully placed him in the car seat. His amazing brown eyes opened and locked onto mine. I froze and stared at him, taking in every part of his face.

'Hi, K. I'm Jordan. Don't worry, little man. I've got you,' I whispered to him, tucking a blanket around the closed buckle of his car seat.

I got into the car and called my mom (with the hands-free option, obviously) and nearly hyperventilated as I slowly drove home with my first son in tow. She laughed at my hysteria in a supportive, 'what have you gotten yourself into' kind of way and we hung up as I pulled into our driveway.

My wife was home, waiting on pins and needles while our dogs worriedly paced around the downstairs. Apparently, they were keenly aware that something was up, but they weren't sure what.

I gathered him up into my arms and carried him inside. Emily had Michael Bublé playing over the Bluetooth speaker downstairs and the fire was going. The 'cozy' vibe was unmistakable, and K sat up in my arms a little bit to look around as I stepped into the foyer.

Emily raced over and started to reach for him. I begrudgingly handed him over (I'm selfish, what can I say?) and smiled at her as she got the same electric feeling, I did at first touch.

'He's perfect,' she said, grinning at me.

I grinned back and agreed: he was perfect. I made him a bottle, got them settled on the couch with the dogs close at hand, and went upstairs to find a diaper and PJs. We got him dressed, got all of his stuff into the washer, and I tore myself away from my little family to pick up the first of his many medications.

The first night, I barely slept. I was so terrified of having this baby in our house. What if he suffocated in his sleep? What if he threw up and choked on it and died? What if his heart just...stopped? What if he climbed out of the crib and smashed his head on the floor and died? What if they call us on Monday and say they're taking him?

It was sheer panic.

The panic only intensified the next morning when we woke up at 10 a.m. to find that he was still asleep. This kid had been asleep for 14 hours already. Surely, we couldn't be this lucky... he must be dead. I went in and heard his tiny (adorable) little snores. He was fine, just exhausted. We let him sleep and finally heard him stirring around 11. Yes, that's 15 hours of sleep without waking. This would not be the last time this happened, either.

For the first few days, he was quiet and stoic. He was snuggly, fighting off multiple infections, and generally just zonked. By the end of the weekend, with 3 full days of antibiotics and an inhaler on board, he was ready to rock. Suddenly he was grinning and giggling and crawling all over the place! He was hungry almost all the time, constantly reaching for our food. Unfortunately, we had been told it was formula-only and so we had to keep his hands off our pizza.

We got him loaded up on clothes, since he'd come with none that fit, and basically spoiled him rotten. Toys and blankets and clothes and pretty much anything a little dude could ever want. He became best friends with our dogs in a matter of days and they were constantly nearby. Our little one, Browser, was fascinated with licking him directly in the mouth (which...ew) and our larger dog, Wall-E, simply kept a watchful eye over him like he'd done with every litter of foster kittens we'd ever had.

The first time we heard his voice I nearly fell over. He'd been

so quiet, aside from small giggles. And then all of a sudden, he looked at me and said, 'EH???' Loud and shrill and focused at me. I looked at him and he did it again. He repeated this until I finally caught on: he was waiting for me to do it back.

I repeated his sound, albeit at a lower volume, and he smiled and turned back to the toys in his lap.

This exchange would become a fundamental part of his communication with us because he didn't talk for 3 months. We referred to it as his 'echolocation'. If we left the room and he wanted to know where we were, he would scream 'EH?' and wait for us to answer. He'd continue this conversation with us while crawling through the downstairs until he found us (almost always a short distance away in the kitchen).

Once he felt like we'd really gotten into the game, he started using it to check if we were still paying attention to him. He'd do it on the way home from school. He'd do it while eating if Emily and I were too busy talking to notice he'd finished his bottle and now wanted to go play. He did it to ask us to identify things, like each dog by name or a car driving past.

His first word to us was 'dog?' which came out more like 'dah?' We were floored. He knew exactly what a dog was. He'd point at our dogs and say 'dah?' and we'd confirm that yes, that was still a dog just like it was 15 seconds ago when you asked. He would also say 'dah?' anytime he saw any other dog (and sometimes cats because those things are confusing) and whenever he heard a dog in the neighborhood barking.

We took him to an Ikea once and he was having a whiney day. My mother handed him a stuffed lab puppy and he grabbed onto it with both fists. He never let the thing go. We had dozens and dozens of stuff toys for him to choose from at home but no, Puppy was now part of the pack. He took Puppy to school, used Puppy as a pillow, and chewed Puppy's tail and ears pretty much constantly.

Eventually, the time came for him to return home. In 4 months he had learned to walk, learned 6 words, 12 signs, and had attended nearly 30 appointments ranging from pulmonary to speech therapy. Picking him up from school was one of the most painful experiences I'd ever had. His teachers were sobbing, we were sobbing, and there was so much confusion on his face as we woke him up from his nap and took him to the car.

We drove to the same building where we'd picked him up, played with him in the front seat while we waited for the clock to strike 3 and then held hands as we walked him through the garage with all his belongings. We had planned to wait there until his mother arrived so we could give him directly to her, but a social worker he'd never met came down in the elevator, took him from our arms, and told us we could leave. It wasn't really an offer as much as it was a strong suggestion.

He looked at us in panic as we started to walk away and screamed at the top of his lungs, shoving against the stranger holding him. We waved goodbye, blew him a kiss, and walked out into the parking garage.

Before I knew it, my knees were on the pavement and I was sobbing into my hands. I could still hear him screaming and it took every part of my strength to not go back racing inside to take him back. Emily managed to catch herself on a wall to

hold her up while she sobbed, but she was as crushed as I was.

There are simply no words to describe the feelings of foster care. We grieved for this child like he had just died, even though he was very much alive. We were thrilled for his mother to get him back, even while our hearts felt ripped from our chests. We regained our freedom, but our silent house suddenly felt empty and oppressive. No more giggles. No more echolocation. No more bottles or baths or bedtimes. There was just none of him left.

Foster care is a challenge. It tests and breaks and reforms every part of who you think you are. It was painful and exhausting and frustrating, but it was also rewarding and happy and the best thing I've ever done with my life.

Despite the shed tears, the anger, and everything else that I could rant about surrounding foster care...I'd do it all again a thousand times over if I could."

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https://www.lovethefamily.com/dont-worry-little-man-ive-got-you-i-whispered-his-amazing-brown-eyes-locked-onto-mine-foster-dads-knees-hit-the-pavement-sobbing-after-son-returned-home-i-could/?utm_source=lwm&utm_medium=share&utm_campaign=email

FOSTER PARENTS NEED TO



BE TRAINED TO BE LOVING AND WELCOMING TO YOUTH OF ALL GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES

By JESSICA CASTILLO

I started having panic attacks when I was 9 years old. I didn't discover what they were for years, so I was simply convinced that I was about to die with every panic attack. Before I was



placed into foster care, my mom would sometimes lie next to where I slept on the floor of our one-bedroom apartment in hopes of comforting me during one of my panic attacks, but after I entered foster care I quickly discovered I was going to have to find different ways to cope with my anxieties and heartache.

Upon moving into my third foster home, without even a hello, the first thing my foster mom told me was, “No, get rid of those tears. There’s no crying in this home. If you keep that up, I’ll send you off to a group home immediately!” So I found out rather quickly that I was going to have to suppress my strong emotions in this home. That changed when my older foster sister moved into the home a few months later. She and I became very close. She was five years older than me, and acted very motherly and comforting towards me when I had my panic attacks.

So what does this have to do with the LGBTQ+ community?

My anxieties often appeared at night, when my heart most wanted peace. One night, I couldn’t stop myself from having a panic attack, and ran to my foster sister’s room crying. She let me lie in her bed with her, saying I could spend the night in her room if it would help me sleep.

Not very long afterwards, her bedroom door slammed open, putting a crack in the wall that it hit. It was my foster mom. She stomped over to where I lay, grabbed my elbow, dragged me over my foster sister’s body and threw me to the floor. “You disgusting lesbian!” she screamed. When I tried to get up, she used her foot to keep me down, and continued to yell at me in Spanish. My foster sister explained the situation over and over, but my foster mom wouldn’t hear it.

The next morning, when I was getting ready for school, my foster mom grabbed me and pulled me into her bathroom, locking the door behind her.

“You’re a disgusting, stupid girl, a disgusting lesbian and I won’t have it in this house,” she hissed at me, spitting with each angry syllable. She hit me in the head, grabbing my hair

and tugging it downwards.

“Stop it!” I cried. “I was just in her room because I was scared!”

“Scared!” she scoffed. “You act like you’re this good, perfect girl, going to church and getting good grades, but you’re really a disgusting lesbian.” She hit me upside the head once more. “I could get rid of you for this!” she continued.

“Please, I’m sorry, I won’t do it again. Just leave me alone,” I pleaded.

She tilted her head, glaring down at me like a bug she was debating stepping on. Without a word, she unlocked the bathroom door, and I ran out to the car where my other foster sisters sat waiting.

I think back on this day often for many reasons. I wasn’t thinking about my sexuality or dating when I was in foster care—the only thing on my mind was reunification with my mother. If I had discovered that I was a part of the LGBTQ+ community, what horrors would have awaited me in this home if I had been transparent about that part of who I was?

According to ChildrensRights.org, a 2019 study found 30.4 percent of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ and 5 percent as transgender, compared to 11.2 percent and 1.17 percent of youth not in foster care. If I experienced what I did as a youth who had no real thoughts on the topic of gender or sexuality, then it’s an undeniable truth that youth who are discovering these things about themselves are experiencing turmoil in the homes where they’re supposed to feel the safest.

There are numerous youths involved in the foster care system who won’t be able to work through their traumas adequately because of their need to suppress who they truly are.

So what can be done about this? Foster parents need to be trained to be loving and welcoming to youth of all genders and sexualities, regardless of the foster parents’ personal beliefs. If a foster child feels that in order to feel safe in their placements they need to suppress a part of who they are, then that placement needs to be re-evaluated and there needs to be a training added to that particular foster parent’s to-do list.

There needs to be accountability, because youth in foster care should be healing from their traumas, not adding to the ones that already exist.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Castillo is a former foster child with a lifetime of love for writing and speaking for those who - more often than not - go unheard. She was in foster care from 2009 to 2014, and adopted from 2014 to 2015. Through the pieces she puts out into the public, she hopes to help those involved in the life of a foster child to better understand them - even if it’s just a little bit - and to encourage foster children to be themselves and to love themselves.

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://imprintnews.org/youth-voice/foster-parents-accepting-genders-sexualities/63688#.YlZgUS-sl3o.mailto>

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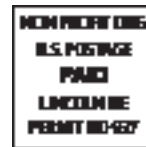
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