

Risking Connection for Foster Parents – Hot Off the Presses

Exciting news! TSI announces the completion of the Risking Connection© (RC) Training Curriculum for Foster Parents. This curriculum is consistent with Sidran and TSI's philosophy of adapting the original RC model for various professional populations. Following publication of the original RC for professionals working with adult trauma survivors, RC has been adapted for use with child-serving providers, faith leaders, domestic violence professionals, and primary care physicians.

The release of RC for Foster Parents comes at an opportune time. Across the nation, states are relying less on residential treatment to treat their most stressed children and youth. Instead, they hope to develop foster families for these youth. The key to the children being able to heal is offering the foster families enough support that they can keep the child in their home and limit disruptions. This curriculum would also be appropriate for teaching biological or kinship parents.

One important element in that support is training. Understanding trauma, how it affects children, and how they can heal helps the family define problem behavior differently. They learn to see that the behavior is not about them, but instead an understandable adaptation to the child's traumatic experiences.

For example, Chelise always had trouble at bedtime. She would not turn out her light, kept getting up, and often had her music on long after her foster mother Barbara told her to turn it off. Barbara viewed this as defiance; I am the adult, Chelise should respect me and do as I say. The more Barbara tried to show Chelise “who was boss” about this and other behaviors, the more Chelise resisted. Eventually, the foster placement disrupted. But when Chelise was placed with Lynn, Lynn immediately understood that if she tried to exert control over Chelise, Chelise would likely withdraw in fear and anger. When Chelise had trouble at bedtime, Lynn realized she was scared at night. She knew that Chelise's biological mother would often leave Chelise at home at night when she left to buy drugs. Lynn established a nighttime ritual, provided a night light, encouraged her to listen to soft music, and stayed by her door until she fell asleep. This was the beginning of a long relationship.

“Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not get bent out of shape.”

Foster mother of horse trainer Buck Brannaman.
From the movie documentary *Buck*

If foster families are to care for children who have experienced trauma, both they and their support team need to pay attention to the vicarious traumatization (VT) they will inevitably experience. Foster care has unique features that contribute to VT. The child is in the family home and the family has no place to escape. Biological children and extended family may be affected by the child's behavior and may not understand the parents' actions. The parent is often handling crisis alone and without much back up. Therefore it is crucial that the family and their helpers learn about what VT is, how to recognize it, strategies for managing it, and ways to

transform it. The Risking Connection curriculum covers these topics and gives the foster parents tools and techniques to manage this part of their jobs. One foster mother in a Risking Connection class said: "I have been a foster mother for sixteen years and this is first time anyone has asked me how the job affects me!"

Risking Connections for Foster Parents contains six two and a half hour sessions. These sessions can be taught once a week for six weeks or combined in other ways, such as on two Saturdays. The sessions cover the following topics:

Session 1: The Trauma Framework and Introduction to Vicarious Traumatization

Session 2: Symptoms are Adaptations

Session 3: Healing Through Relationships

Session 4: Managing a Crisis

Session 5: Responding When the Child Hurts Others

Session 6: Taking Care of Ourselves While Doing This Difficult Work

The sessions include engaging and participatory learning modalities such as video, application exercise, small group activities, and discussion. Every effort has been made to make the material accessible to parents such as using the word "child" instead of "client" and to using real world examples from home situations.

If your agency is interested in the RC for Foster Parents training and you do NOT currently use RC at your agency, contact Steve Brown at steveb@klingberg.com. If an agency already uses RC and current RC Associate Trainers want to train RC for Foster Care in their agency, the trainer will be expected to attend a short training that introduces them to the new materials. We will offer this training in person for RC trainers in the northeast and via webinar for trainers across the US and Canada. We hope to have some foster parents become trainers of this curriculum, so agencies can establish training teams of a clinician and a foster parent.

Please join us in celebrating this exciting new expansion of our mission to change the treatment of children, teens, and adults who have experienced trauma.