

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 4:41 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Common Diagnoses in Foster Children



Dear ,

It is critical for children in foster care to get routine developmental screenings and any necessary follow-up. Routine pediatric visits include developmental check-ups, but children may not be seen regularly by a pediatrician while living in foster care. A child's physical and mental functioning may improve if problems are recognized during routine developmental screenings and necessary treatment is provided.

Given that the life of a child in foster care is often filled with separation and loss it is not surprising that behavioral and psychiatric issues are common in these children.

Below are some common diagnosis of children in foster care.

Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are characterized by prolonged feelings of stress and worry that is way out of proportion to the current situation and may be interfering with a person's daily life. Common anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), phobias, panic attacks, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). You can learn more about anxiety disorders, their causes and how to treat them [here](#).

Asthma

Asthma is an inflammatory disorder of the airways, which causes attacks of wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and coughing.

Attachment disorders

Attachment disorders are characterized by the difficulty in forming emotional attachments to others. Children who have experienced a disruption in their relationship with their parents or caregivers may develop an attachment disorder, affecting their social, behavioral and emotional well-being. One of the most common types of attachment disorders is Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). Children with RAD have most likely been abused physically or emotionally, or neglected by their previous parents or caregivers. Many have had severe problems or disruptions in their early relationships.

Because a child's comfort, affection and nurturing needs are not met, they do not establish a loving or caring attachment with others. Children with RAD benefit from an individualized therapy plan. Visit the [Attachment and Treatment Training Institute](#), or [ATTACH](#) to learn more about attachment disorders and how to treat them.

Depression

Depression is a state of feeling sad for days on end. It's more than just "feeling blue"-these feelings persist on a daily basis and interfere with an individual's ability to function. Symptoms can include sadness, loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, change in weight, sleeplessness, loss of energy, thoughts of death or suicide. Please keep in mind that this is not a complete list, and depression affects everyone differently. Children in foster care may be diagnosed with depression due to the losses they have experienced in their lives. You can learn more about the signs any symptoms of depression and treatment methods at the [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#). Please remember that there is no "one size fits all" treatment method for children/teens experiencing depression, so talk to your child's therapist to find the best treatment for your child.

Developmental delay

A child with developmental delays is behind in their language, social, thinking, or motor skills for a child of their age. Typically a child with a developmental delay is not progressing at the same rate as their peers. A child's development in any of these areas can be affected by their early upbringing. Children who experience any form of neglect may have missed their "developmental milestones" for things like walking, talking, learning, and more. You can learn more about the effects of neglect on a child's development [here](#). Talk with your child's doctor if you believe your child has a developmental delay, and ask for their recommendation on how you should proceed.

Emotional or behavioral problems

Children who have experienced abuse and neglect may exhibit emotional and behavioral problems. Children with emotional problems may have a hard time controlling and displaying their emotions, have a hard time getting along with siblings and peers, display poor coping skills, display helplessness when they are under stress, have a dependent or fearful attachment, and more. Children with behavioral problems have a greater risk of developing a

conduct disorder. Children with behavioral problems may have a hard time making and keeping friends, following the rules, telling the truth, and more. You can learn more about emotional and behavioral problems [here](#).

Failure to thrive

Failure to thrive is often characterized by the inability to take in, retain and use calories to gain weight and grow. Failure to thrive is caused by many things, including social factors, gastrointestinal issues, a chronic illness, medical disorder, infections, and more. You can learn more about failure to thrive and its potential causes and types of treatment on the [Kids Health](#) website.

Prenatal exposure to cocaine, alcohol, narcotics

Exposure to substances such as drugs and alcohol can have an impact on the developing fetus, and in turn the child when they are born and as they grow. Common effects include low birth weight, low IQ, a small head and brain, limb malformations, and organ malformations. Later on in life, children may have trouble focusing, forming attachments, struggle in school, practice poor self-control, lack social skills, display memory problems, and more. For more information on how pre-natal substance use affects a child, visit the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) website.

Shaken baby syndrome (SBS)

Shaken baby syndrome is a form of physical child abuse that occurs when a parent or caregiver violently shakes an infant or small child, causing their brain to bounce back and forth in their skull. This motion can cause bruising, bleeding, swelling and pressure inside the brain. Ultimately this can lead to permanent brain damage or death. In addition, a child's spine, neck and eyes may be damaged.

Sleep disorders

Sleep disorders can take a few different forms, including sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy, and insomnia. Children in foster care may experience one of these sleep disorders, or may have trouble falling asleep due to nightmares. You can learn more about the various sleep disorders, their causes, and potential treatments on the [National Institute of Health \(NIH\)](#) website.

Emotional Needs: The children AFFEC serves have been removed from their birth families due to neglect, and/or abuse, and have varying degrees of emotional needs. Many of these children are slow to trust a new person or family, having suffered past losses and often finding the adults in their lives unreliable or unable to care for them. Emotional difficulties can also result in a child having behavioral difficulties. Hoarding food, withdrawing, having difficulty telling the truth and competing for attention are among the most common behaviors.

It can be especially challenging to deal with a child who has been through a traumatic experience. If a child is unwilling or unable to discuss these experiences, the frustration may be so overwhelming that it affects the child's ability to function on a day-to-day basis. A sense of security and support services will often help a child make great strides in a new family. Many of the waiting children benefit from counseling and other therapeutic services.

Physical Difficulties: While most of the waiting children are healthy, some do have physical difficulties or disabilities. Some may have asthma, cleft palate, mild forms of bronchitis or allergies or easily treatable medical conditions. Other children have more severe physical disabilities, such as limb deformities, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, congenital heart disease, life-threatening illnesses and various types of developmental disabilities.

Learning Disabilities: Many waiting children have difficulties comprehending, processing or retaining oral and/or written information. Within the general public school population, 10 to 20 percent of children have some form of learning disability. Learning disabilities can manifest themselves in any number of ways. The most common problems are Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), hyperactivity and dyslexia.

Please keep in mind that this is not a complete list of the challenges children in foster care may face, nor is this list to be used to diagnose children. It is also important to remember that a lot of these challenges and disabilities may be reversed with time, patience, love and the right services. Don't let them intimidate you! Remember, just as there is no such thing as a "perfect" parent, there is no such thing as a perfect child. These children may have some challenges, but they all want to be loved unconditionally and have a family to support them.

Nora Sharp
Matching Assistance Coordinator
A Family for Every Child
nora.sharp@afamilyforeverychild.org

