Child Abuse Prevention and Education

Every year, approximately 900,000 children are the victims of abuse and/or neglect. The common factors of abuse and neglect are substance abuse, lack of support, a history of abuse, and domestic violence.

It is our job as a society to keep kids in our community safe, and to help prevent abuse and neglect. Reporting suspected abuse and neglect is one way to help children. Providing support and resources to their families is another great way to help.

Abuse is often cyclical, and there is a good chance that the perpetrator came from a home where he/she was abused or neglected, making that the only environment they've ever known. About one-third of children who are abused end up becoming abusers themselves. Reaching out and helping these people can make a positive impact on their family.

Preventing Abuse

The following are a few simple tips you can employ to help prevent abuse:

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Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway - How the Child Welfare System Works

NCTSN - Birth Parents with Trauma History and the Child Welfare System: A Guide for Resource Parents

Hattie's Advocate by Matthew and Krista Hoffman, L.C.P.C.

Parenting the Hurt Child by Gregory Keck and Regina Kupecky, LSW

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog by Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D. and Maria Szalavitz

The Foster Parenting Toolbox by Kim

- Volunteer at a domestic violence shelter
- Donate food to/volunteer at a food bank or family shelter
- Volunteer at/support a local rehab center
- Volunteer at/support a local relief nursery

- Become a respite care provider
- Become a foster/resource parent
- Support struggling parents by offering to watch their children so they can go grocery shopping, take a class, go on a job interview, or attend counseling
- Build relationships with children in your community
- Report abuse to the National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453

The Effects of Trauma on Birth Parents

Abuse is a vicious cycle, with the perpetrator often being a victim of some form of abuse or neglect themselves. Social learning is a powerful tool, and is at play in these types of situations. Some birth parents are able to break this cycle and raise their children in a different environment than the one they grew up in, while others are not. Understanding a birth parent's history of trauma is key to being able to help support and work with them.

A birth parent's history of trauma can effect the following:

Their ability to provide a safe environment - Some birth parents are overprotective, while other's do not realize that they are putting their child in danger.

Their ability to cope - Many birth parents turn

Phagan-Hansel

Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families by Jayne Schooner

to drugs or alcohol.

Their reactions - Birth parents may react strongly or negatively to things, and have a hard time expressing their feelings and emotions.

The likelihood of being a victim - More often than not, the birth parent continues to be a victim of abuse and violence throughout adulthood.

Their sense of control - Birth parents may feel they are losing their sense of control over their child, especially if a caseworker and judge are involved.

Their ability to trust - Just like their children, birth parents are hesitant to trust others, as they have grown up believing they can only rely on themselves. These feelings of distrust are often exacerbated if their child(ren) is/are removed from their home.

Their "trauma triggers" - It is very likely that a birth parent is suffering from PTSD (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and certain situations/smells/sounds/people may bring up strong emotions, leading the parent to react differently than they would if they were not suffering from PTSD. In these types of situations parents may "shutdown" or become numb.

How You Can Help Birth Parents

First and foremost, just like with a child, understanding how trauma can effect a birth parent's behaviors is key. This understanding will allow you to be more supportive and successful in your attempts to work with a child's birth parents. The following are additional tips on how you can work together effectively:

Understand their reactions - Remembering that their feelings of fear, anger or resentment are a reaction to their traumatic background

and not you can help you not take it personally.

Don't blame or judge - A child's birth parents are not "bad". Keeping in mind that their history brought them to this point will help you effectively work with them. If a birth parent feels at any point you are being judgmental, they will shut down.

Compliment - If you've noticed the child's parent(s) have made an effort to make a positive change in some aspect of their life, recognize it. This will help keep them motivated to continue making these positive changes.

Listen to their opinion - Even if you disagree with what they are saying, let the child's birth parent verbalize their suggestions on how to raise their child. Keep in mind that the birth parent is reacting to fear, a loss of control, and feelings of inadequacy. Try and keep the discussions centered around the child and their needs.

Be honest and direct - If you are presenting information that may be difficult for the birth parent to handle and accept, present the information as an observation rather than opinion. Acknowledge and be open about any mistakes you have made.

Establish boundaries - Have clear boundaries established. Be consistent and follow through on your commitments.

Be flexible - Remember that in agreements there is give and take, and it is not important that you always "win". The child is the one who's interests you need to have in mind. Relationships take time to build, so understand that things will not go smoothly all the time. Keep working towards building a mutual trust.

Acknowledge difficult moments - Court hearings, case meetings, and sometimes visits are hard on the child and birth parent. Acknowledge the fact that they are difficult on both parties, and work alongside the birth parents to set up a routine for each of these occasions.

Be mindful of your expressions - Tone, eye contact and body language can say more than words sometimes, so be aware of the non-verbal signals you are sending.

Citation

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