Common School Problems

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All children struggle in school at one point or another. Whether it is academically, socially, or both, sometimes children need extra support. Children in foster care are no different in the behaviors they exhibit in the classroom. The difference, however, is the root cause of their behaviors. As such, the parent(s) and the child's teacher need to approach the situation a little differently. Understanding a child's behaviors and what is causing them is key.

Common School Problems & Their Causes

The following are some common behavior problems children in foster care exhibit at school, and their likely causes:

Lagging behind academically - A child in foster care will experience multiple placements before they are finally adopted. Every time a child moves foster homes, they may move in the school system, perhaps to another district. In addition, for some children's biological families,

Additional Information

ASCD - The Face of Foster Care

Child Adoption Matters - Adoption and School Issues

Local School Directory - The Impact on Adopted Children at School

Resources

IFAPA - The Weekly Word: The Back-to-School Issue
Includes tips on how to ease transition into school, homework tips, IEP information, links to resources, information for educators, and more

National Center for Learning Disabilities
Information and resources for parents of children diagnosed with learning disabilities

academics were not a priority. This could mean that a child doesn't attend school until he/she is placed in a foster home. This automatically puts them behind their peers.

Not completing homework - If a child did not have academic support from their biological parents, they may have a hard time making school a priority. In addition, if they are having trouble with their homework, they may not ask their foster or adoptive parents for help because they don't know how. Instead, they will opt to not complete the assignment.

Failing a class - Due to the fact that a child in foster care moves so frequently, and/or they may not have attended school on a regular basis prior to coming into care, they are often placed in a grade level above their academic level. This causes them to fall behind. In addition, many children blame themselves for being removed from their home because they "failed" to be a good son/daughter. This sets the tone for how they deal with other areas of their life. Since they "failed" their family, they will fail at school, too.

Disruptive behaviors in class - Children in foster care have learned that negative, disruptive behaviors get them attention. They may have also learned aggressive behaviors from their biological family, and believe that is how people act towards each other.

Lying - Children want to please their parents and families, so if they are failing at school they may tell their family that they are doing well, even though they're not. It is also likely that lying and cheating behaviors were demonstrated in their biological homes, so children believe this is how one gets through life.

Being bullied - Being a foster or adopted child makes a child different from the rest of his/her peers. Living with strangers also makes a foster child stand out, which leads to teasing and bullying from his/her peers.

Resources for Educators

Center for Family Development - An Overview of Reactive Attachment Disorder for Teachers

Child Welfare Information Gateway - Adoption Resources for Teachers

IFAPA - Adoption Basics for Educators: How Adoption Impacts Children & How Educators Can Help

On top of that, children in foster care may have a hard time making and keeping friends due to a lack of social skills, which adds to their social problems.

Being afraid of school - There are many reasons why a child may fear school. CPS may have taken them into protective custody while they were in school, creating a negative association. They may be picked on by their peers, or may be doing poorly which decreases their desire to attend. A child may also have attachment issues and separation anxiety, and are afraid to leave their foster parents.

How You Can Help

As the child's foster or adoptive parent, there are a few ways you can help your child succeed in the classroom:

Advocate for your child - Children need you to speak up for them. They need you to talk to their teachers, guidance counselor, caseworker, and community organizations to help them get the tools they need to succeed. Work together with the child's teacher to find out where your child is struggling, but also where they are succeeding. Come up with an action plan to help the child in any areas he/she is struggling. Always remain involved, and asked to be kept in the loop. Check in with your child's teacher every week or every couple of weeks to get an update on how he/she is doing. Find out what you can do at home to help your child succeed in class as well.

Have reasonable expectations - Remember that your child's developmental age is most likely different than his/her chronological age. As such, you should expect them to be learning and performing at their developmental age. Make sure they are placed in a classroom where they will not be struggling and lagging behind their peers academically. Build your child's self-

esteem, reward them for small successes, and support them in their school assignments. Offer your help every night. They may not take you up on your offer right away, but it's important that they at least know you are there to give them help as they need it.

Be sensitive to "family" assignments - If possible, talk to your child's teacher ahead of time about any assignments revolving around family - "Family Tree", baby pictures, genetics, etc. *Adoptive Families* has some great article titled "Tackling Tricky Assignments" that covers some of the more common family-oriented assignments at all grade levels, and presents alternatives to them to make the child more comfortable.

10 Ways to Encourage Your Child During the School Year

1. Attend parent-teacher conferences.

2. Let them hear you praise them in front of their teachers.

3. Talk to them about their day.

4. Help them study.

5. Show up for any concerts, plays, sporting events, field trips, or awards ceremonies.

6. Hang their artwork on the fridge.

7. Show understanding when they have a hard day at school.

8. Communicate frequently with their teacher about their progress in the classroom.

9. Surprise them with notes in their backpack or lunchbox.

10. Celebrate their successes.

> List courtesy of IFAPA - The Weekly Word: Special Back-to-School Issue