

## Reparenting the hurt child, part I

by Richard Kagan, Ph.D.

Rebuilding attachments is similar to taking a long hike up an eastern mountain in the United States. Unlike higher mountain ranges, it may take hours, or even a full day, to reach an opening where the hiker is rewarded with a panoramic view. This is hiking for the patient and the steadfast. There are no safe shortcuts to the top.

Hikers learn from experience that trails typically become narrower, steeper, and more difficult the closer you get to the summit. Preparation is essential: maps, guidebooks, consulting with experienced hikers or guides, and checking on forecasts. Packing the right equipment, the support of fellow hikers, a guide for rough terrain, and the availability of emergency services can make the difference between an enriching adventure and a harmful ordeal.

In much the same way, we can view rebuilding attachments as a journey that can be facilitated by experienced guides, preparation, resources, curiosity, and an appreciation of children, their joy, their distress, and how they challenge us to struggle to win their trust.

### **Commitment**

Rebuilding attachments depends on strong and caring adults committed to raising a child in crisis. The child's biological or adoptive parents develop the courage to help the child confront and overcome traumas that have blocked his or her development. To help a child, parents must develop the strength to face

their own demons and protect a child from having to relive the neglect or abuse of the past.

The adults lead the way and show the child that it is possible to remember, to recover the good parts, to look terror in the face and to master the bad. The child can only do this *within* the security of relationships with caring *and* committed adults. Temporary relationships cannot provide the antidote a child needs when attach-

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a test of parents' courage,  
understanding and strength.***

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ment breaks down. Respite placements may be necessary, but the core work needs to take place between the child and adults committed to long-term relationships.

The child needs to see that his or her parents have the capacity to deal with stress and to demonstrate self-control, before he or she can risk rebuilding or creating an attachment. Effective parenting means staying calm "in the eye of the storm"; remaining in control emotionally when the child is out of control.

Practitioners can help parents step back, appreciate the "dance" of their child, and maintain a sense of humor. Crying is healthy. Asking for help leads to support and encouragement. Validation is essential.

Only a parent awakened several times a night, night after night, by a ten-year-old shrieking "No! No! No!" at the top of his or her lungs, can truly appreciate the impact of trauma on a child and how this affects family members. Only a parent facing a glaring youth holding a bat, a large pot, or a knife, can appreciate what "domestic violence" means to families.

Parents need validation, respect, and concrete resources in order to reparent traumatized children. Family-support workers, parenting classes, and training in advocacy can empower parents, with a focus accessing or creating the services needed by their children. "Time-outs" for parents, opportunities to call for help, availability of respite and crisis workers, and having someone trustworthy to call are essential components of both adoption and reunification plans. Support from relatives, friends, practitioners, and community leaders strengthens parents. With back-up services in place, parents can step back and work with practitioners to expand possibilities and develop creative responses to their child's behavior.

### **Countertransference**

A neglected and abused child typically rekindles painful feelings in biological parents seeking to reassert their authority, or substitute parents trying to bring a child into their

(See *Reparenting*, cont. on page 2)

(*Reparenting, cont. from page 1*)

home. The child has learned that attachment-related behaviors provoked his or her parents or previous caretakers to become disoriented, to reject or abandon the child, or to act in a frightened or frightening manner. A child's new parents, or parents working to reunite, need to be strong enough to validate his or her past experiences and help him or her find a new way to feel safe from the pain.

The hurt child's simultaneous need and fear of closeness naturally triggers parents' *own* memories of loss, rejection or abuse. Parents need to master their *own* losses and any conflict with attachment figures in their lives, at least to a level at which they can manage the child's reminders of what happened in the parents' own lives. Parents who have faced and overcome their own experience of losses, neglect, or violence become far stronger in the eyes of hurt children than adults who have never faced, or faced but not addressed, these problems. Hurt children have developed, by necessity, a way to tell whether an adult's courage and commitment are "just pretend" or authentic.

Parents often see their children's behaviors as personal threats or provocations. It helps to understand that traumatized children typically reenact their past with any parental figure who tries to change their lives and especially with adults who appear similar in age, sex, or mannerisms with previous caretakers who have hurt the child. This is an essential part of children's testing whether their homes (new or old) are really different than in the past.

When we stop and listen to a child's repeated behaviors, we can almost always find patterns that make sense in terms of his or her experiences. For instance, a child who lived with a series of violent men, may repeatedly provoke men, and father figures in particular, to lose their tempers. If the child provokes a man to lose his temper, the child gains a sense of predictability. The child's expectations have been confirmed. Repetitions of the past can paradoxically serve as

## Area Inservices

### Support Groups

**Elkhart County**, contact Jody Richards at (574) 533-1234, ext. 218.

**St. Joseph County** group meets the 1st Thursday of each month Contact Tom & Linda Cleveland at (574) 232-3404.

**Marshall/Starke County** group meets the 3rd Monday of every other month at the Plymouth Library (May 19, 6-7:30 p.m.). Contact Melissa Bachtel at (574) 935-3052.

### Grandparents as Parents

- 1st Wednesday of each month, 10 a.m., at 3609 Mishawaka Ave., South Bend.
- 3rd Monday of each month, 6:30 p.m., at Living Stones Church, 718 East Don Moyer Ave, South Bend. For more information, call (574) 232-6890.

### Parenting Classes/Elkhart

Mondays, October 20-December 15, 5-8 p.m., Bashor Children's Home; Wednesdays, October 22-December 17, 9:15 -11:45 a.m., Joy Rose Center; Thursdays, October 23-December 18, 5-8 p.m., Joy Rose Center

To register, contact Elizabeth Cruz at (574) 522-1998, ext. 71. Fee for the 9-week workshop is \$35 for one parent or \$45 for two.

### Pathways from Childhood Aggression to Adolescent Violence

Friday, November 7, 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., at Matterhorn Conference Center, 2041 Cassopolis St., Elkhart. Featuring James Garbarino, Ph.D. Cost: \$60; 5.0 CEUs. Sponsored by Oaklawn. For a brochure call (574) 537-2680.

reassuring rituals to calm a child's fears of change and to fill the voids in his or her life. A child who experienced a series of placements lasting longer than nine to twelve months will often begin getting into trouble as he or she approaches the nine-month point in a new home. Once we see a child's behaviors as part of old patterns that fit with the child's experiences, his or her behaviors may be annoying or obnoxious, but they begin to make sense. With this understanding, parents can pull back and prepare for the next predictable outburst.

Parents can work with practitioners to detoxify these patterns by making the covert, overt. At this point, a child's behaviors may still be upsetting but at the same time, can become far less powerful, redundant, and even boring. Parents can remind themselves that their job is to maintain a calm demeanor, as much as possible, and understand that their child is pushing them to do the painful and essential work of rebuilding attachments. *Reparenting* the hurt child is a test of parents'

courage, understanding and strength.

Every "crisis" generated by the child thus becomes a call and an opportunity to demonstrate that the child's new home is *different* from his or her past. Parents need to develop and utilize support from friends, family members, and practitioners to stay calm, to stay in control, and to affirm their commitment to raising the child. The child's stability grows in conjunction with the parents' increasing empowerment and renewed dedication to the child.

A child's provocative behavior can be both expected and welcomed as indicators of what the child and his or her family need to address in efforts to reunite, or if necessary, what losses must be grieved and what past hardships must be overcome with new parents. Crises test the truth of parents' commitment and provide crucial steps in the process of reattachment.

Excerpted with permission from *Rebuilding Attachments with Traumatized Children* by Richard Kagan, Ph.D. More from this book will be shared in future issues of *Foster Parent Network News*.

**Reservations for the following training sessions can be made by calling (574) 533-1234 or 800-282-0809, ext. 243. Classes may be cancelled if not enough persons register. Alternative training is available through books, audio and video. A web site at [www.fosterparents.com](http://www.fosterparents.com) lists approved foster parent trainings. For a list of pre-approved materials as well as the training verification form, go to [www.oaklawn.org](http://www.oaklawn.org), click on Services and Programs, then Services for Children and Adolescents, then Collaborative Programs. Look for Traditional Foster Care to find the forms. Remember, traditional homes can receive up to four hours and special needs or therapeutic homes can receive up to eight training hours annually through books, audio, video or internet. Certification of the training hours are dependent upon approval from the training coordinator. Please note that child care is NOT provided during trainings.**

## Preservice

Required training: 20 hours for foster parents or 26 hours for adoptive parents. Day one of each training session must be taken first. All pre-service classes include Universal Precautions and First Aid Training; you do not need to sign up for these classes separately.

### Elkhart

October 25, November 1, 8, 15  
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.  
Oaklawn, Elkhart

December 6, 13, 20, January 10  
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.  
Oaklawn, Elkhart

### St. Joseph County

November 8, 15, 22, December 6  
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.  
*December 6 will end at 2:00 p.m.*  
United Way, South Bend

## First Aid & Safety

Meets criteria for certification and State requirements for Foster Parents. CPR—due before certification expires; First Aid—due every three years; Universal Precautions must be current at relicensure.

### Universal Precautions/ Bloodborne Pathogens

- Wednesday, November 19, 6:00 p.m., United Way, South Bend
- Monday, December 15, 6:30 p.m., Oaklawn, Elkhart

### First Aid (immediately following Universal Precautions training)

- Wednesday, November 19, United Way, South Bend
- Monday, December 15, 6:30 p.m., Oaklawn, Elkhart

## Important information about trainings

- Both Elkhart County and St. Joseph County trainings are held at various locations. Check individual trainings for location.
- You **MUST** register for classes in advance so that we can prepare for the number attending.

### CPR

- Saturday, November 1, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Oaklawn, Elkhart
- Saturday, November 1, 1:00—4:00 p.m., Oaklawn, Elkhart
- Saturday, November 22, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend
- Saturday, November 22, 1:00—4:00 p.m., Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend
- Saturday, December 13, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend
- Saturday, December 13, 1:00—4:00 p.m., Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend

## Inservice classes

10–20 hours of training required each year. **Classes are 6:00–9:00 p.m. unless otherwise specified.**

### Handbook Training

Cancelled until a new handbook is published.

### How to handle lying Thursday, October 30, Oaklawn, Elkhart

Effective strategies in working with children who lie.

## Pre-adoption/Permanency

**Part 1 - Monday, November 6,  
Part 2 - Thursday, November 13,  
both at Oaklawn, Elkhart**

Required for those wishing to adopt. The curriculum is session 11 & 12 of pre-service training for foster, adoptive and kinship parent/caregivers. 3 hours in-service credit.

## Working with Sexually Abused Children

**Friday, November 7, 9:00 a.m.-  
12:30 p.m., Oaklawn, Elkhart**

This morning class will address healthy and problem behaviors plus effective ways to work with sexually abused children.

## Effective Communication with DCS

**Monday, November 10, Oaklawn,  
Elkhart**

## Educational Surrogate

**Monday, November 17, Juvenile  
Justice Center, South Bend**

A surrogate parent is appointed to ensure that the educational rights of a child with disabilities are protected when the parent is unable or unwilling to do so.

## "Freedom Writers" Movie & Discussion

**Monday, December 1, Oaklawn,  
Elkhart**

Teens finding hope through writing.

## "Georgia Rule" Movie & Discussion

**Tuesday, December 9, Juvenile  
Justice Center, South Bend**

Women overcoming three generations of dysfunction.

## Coordinator's Corner

Jerica Tripp, M.S.  
Team Leader, Traditional Foster Care



Jerica Tripp

### Feeling overwhelmed?

Hello foster parents! I'm sure by now that many of you are feeling a little swamped by school projects, sporting events and numerous appointments. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please remember the resources that are available to you, including support groups in your county, as well as respite care. It is also helpful to communicate with the case managers and licensing staff

so that they are aware of your needs. We want to do our best to support both you and your children!

### Holiday schedule

I know the holidays are a busy time for everyone, so we will not hold trainings between December 21 and January 9, when most of your children will be on Christmas break. Hopefully, this will make the holidays a little less stressful for you as you enjoy time with your families! A reminder to please to plan ahead if you are needing training hours by the end of the year.

### Cancellation policy

We have recently implemented a cancellation policy for Foster Care Trainings. If a training has been cancelled it will be announced on WNDU-TV with other local closings as well as on their website at

www.wndu.com. You can also call the Oaklawn switchboard and they will know if there is a cancellation due to weather conditions.

I hope this information is helpful to you. We certainly appreciate all of you and want to do our best to make things easier for you! Thanks again for all you do and Happy Holidays!

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Phone: (574) 533-1234, ext. 754  
Toll free: 800-282-0809, ext. 754  
Fax: (574) 537-2638

Address Service Requested  
Important information for  
Foster Parents!

Goshen, Indiana 46527  
330 Lakeview Drive  
P.O. Box 809

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# Foster Parent Training Registration Form

**Use this form only for network training classes** (those in the box on page 3). Please complete the following information about yourself, your spouse or companion (if applicable) and the training sessions you would like to attend. Fold, seal, stamp and mail to the Traditional Foster Care office.

## **First Participant**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Agency that maintains your license \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## **Second Participant**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Agency that maintains your license \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Training topic \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Traditional Foster Care  
2600 Oakland Avenue  
Elkhart, IN 46517**

Place  
stamp  
here

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