

Through the Eyes of a Child

My husband Terry and I are parenting biological, adoptive, and foster children. We have been fostering for over 14 years and have fostered over 40 children. Many of our children were placed in our home in lieu of residential care facilities, while others were received directly from such facilities. Looking back over the years of foster care, I truly believe that every child that entered our home could have benefited from Trauma Informed Care (TIC). Many children lack the ability to properly identify their emotions. So often, when children make a poor decision, or have negative behaviors, they describe themselves as angry. Yet, often after exploring with them their thoughts and feelings, we find that they are in fact, sad, scared, or feeling rejected. TIC enables the child to build upon her own vocabulary and personal awareness. The children are taught to be accountable for their actions, while learning to understand why they choose to make wrong choices for themselves.

The children we have had in care will typically refuse to acknowledge sadness. We ask the children, "What would happen if you attempted to get our attention over a period of time, and we ignored you?" The child will respond, "I would get mad." "So what do you think is happening when 'sad' is trying to get your attention and you choose to ignore sad?" The child responds, "Sad will get mad." Tuning into your child's feelings will allow you to aid them with identifying their feelings correctly. Use



ally, during this process, stories emerge about their past that you can share with their therapist. My suggestion to adoptive and foster parents is to try and see life through the eyes of the child. So many of these children have been traumatized, and have been unable to trust adults.

Initially, when we began fostering, we felt that the foster children only needed our love and understanding, and that their behaviors would just disappear. We raised them like our own biological children, only to be frustrated when their behaviors did not match that of our own biological children. TIC training teaches us that these children are not like our biological children, who had love and attention since birth. Many have experienced different forms of trauma in their life and have been neglected or abused.

We have a young lady who, on a regular basis, would wake up at least 5 to 6 times per night. She would go to the kitchen and raid the cupboard. She would not take one or two cookies, but instead would take and eat an entire

package of cookies. We tried many different bedtime rituals, including tucking her in bed with her favorite teddy bear. After attending the TIC training, we sat back and looked at the situation through the eyes of the child, and thought that maybe this child, who had been homeless and had gone hungry in the past, was "re-experiencing" the event during her sleep. So, one night when she went to bed, we tucked her in bed with her teddy bear and a peanut butter sandwich. She did not get out of bed during the night. She told us in the morning that she had woken several times during the night, but was comforted when she saw her sandwich. This was not a normal routine in our home, as our children were never allowed to eat in bed, but in this case, it was what the child needed.

Over the years, we have found some good resources on trauma - we have learned how the impact of trauma is different for children and adults, studied fact sheets about trauma, etc. - all from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsn.org. Many organizations are now offering Trauma Informed Parenting Skills (TIPS) classes, among them, Community Care Resources, Inc. Terry and I have certainly benefited greatly from these trainings. But, don't just learn it, live it! It will not only help the child or children you care for get stronger, it will also make life easier for you.

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