Learning Never Stops

When is it OK to stop learning? When can we confidently say that we know it all? Surely the answer to both those questions would be never. Life in general, and resource parenting in particular, requires us to continually add to our store of knowledge, our bag of tricks, our skills in dealing with human behavior and our understanding of life’s many challenges. For resource parents, the stakes are high, because our knowledge and skills can make all the difference in a child’s life. If a child, already traumatized by abuse and neglect, is placed with resource parents who understand his needs, and know how to respond effectively, those resource parents can redeem a life. They can inspire trust, provide hope and show the way to a happier future for a child. Even if a case record might paint an a pessimistic picture of that child’s future prospects for mental health and success as an adult, a caring and knowledgeable resource family can open up a world of possibilities. And that’s where in-service training comes in. The caring, the want-to is a fundamental requirement for a resource parent. But the knowledge, the how-to, is just as important. The requirement that all resource parents earn 12 hours of in-service training each year is one way that OKDHS helps resource parents develop their skills and increase their knowledge.

The pre-service training, the 27-hour OK PRIDE workshop, is a starter course on understanding the special needs of children who have been traumatized by abuse and neglect. But when that training is completed, resource parents still need to learn more. Currently, in-service training credit can be earned in several ways:

• Online training through Foster Parent College or another site approved by OKDHS.
• Conferences such as Together We Can! In the Oklahoma City area each spring.
• Local support group meeting programs, when approved in advance, and
• Educational materials such as DVDs and books, available at your county Human Services Center.

Because more and more people use the Internet regularly, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services is now providing six pre-paid training units, enough to satisfy your total mandatory annual requirement of 12 in-service training hours, through Foster Parent College.

To enroll in Foster Parent College, go to http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/programs/fft.shtml. Although online training is convenient and now free, resource parents are encouraged to seek out a variety of in-service training opportunities and not limit your learning to online courses. The discussion between trainer and participants in face-to-face presentations is interesting and helpful.

So, avoid the panic. Don’t wait until December to try to earn 12 hours of in-service training for 2009. Be a growing resource parent all year long. Nourish yourself with a steady diet of new information and exercise new skills throughout the year, because learning never stops.
All About Sleep and Kids

By Stephen Gillaspy, PhD, and psychology fellows Amy Cherry, PhD, Lana Beasley, PhD, and Elizabeth Risch, PhD.

Children who get enough sleep are less likely to be moody or have behavior problems and often develop better memory, concentration, and longer attention spans. Children who are lacking in sleep can also appear to be hyper rather than sleepy.

Normal Sleep Patterns

Infants – up to 1 year of age:
Newborns sleep about 16 hours per day. The average is about 16 hours divided into 3- to 4-hour segments, or as much sleep as possible between feedings. They may not have regular times for napping. By age 1, infants usually sleep 13 to 14 hours per day, but may not sleep through the night.

Toddlers – ages 1 to 2:
Children in this age range sleep 11 to 13 hours per day. They often need a morning nap and an afternoon nap.

Preschoolers – ages 3 to 5:
Preschoolers usually sleep 10 to 12 hours per day, including one mid-day nap of 1 to 2 hours and nighttime sleep. Even if they stop napping, children this age may be less fussy in the evening if they have a quiet time for rest in the afternoon.

School-aged children – ages 6 to 12:
Elementary school age children commonly take a 15 to 30 minutes after lying down quietly before they are asleep. They usually sleep nine to 11 hours per night.

Adolescents – ages 13 to 17:
Teens often continue to need nine to 10 hours of sleep per night, but many do well with eight hours.

What Can I Do To Help My Child Sleep?

- Plan a quiet time of at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Set a bedtime and stick to it. Changing bedtimes can cause problems such as trouble getting to sleep and waking up in the morning.
- Have a predictable pre-bedtime routine such as a bath and reading time. Do not put your child to sleep by allowing them to watch TV or movies.
- Accept that your child may lie in bed up to 30 minutes before falling asleep. Do not tell your child to go to sleep since telling them this often increases how long it takes to fall asleep.
- Help children feel more secure by allowing them to have a night light or a special toy in bed with them.
- Watch for signs of tiredness in your child. Children may be whiny and difficult rather than directly showing or saying they are tired.
- If your child gets up or calls out after going to bed, stay calm and limit how much attention you give your child. Do not get angry with them since this often makes the problem worse.
- If your child has a nightmare, calmly reassure them that the dream is not real. Help them understand that everyone has sometimes. Talk with your child during the daytime about nightmares they have had. Reassure children that they are OK and it was just a dream.
- Do not let your child have drinks with caffeine for five hours before bedtime.
- Adapted from “Sleep and Children: What’s Normal?” by Gayle Zieman, Ph.D.

Common Sleep Misbehaviors and Recommendations

Climbing Out of the Crib

Once a child learns how to climb out of a crib, they will definitely try to climb out again and are at risk for harm.

One solution is to put your child’s mattress on the floor.

Nap or Bedtime Refusal

Young children should spend 60 to 90 minutes resting each day. If your child leaves their room or refuses to nap, return them to their room to engage in quiet activity such as reading. Do not allow TV or video games during this time.

Your child may refuse to put on their pajamas, lie down, close her eyes or stay in bed.

Leave your child in their room and avoid insisting any of the above actions. Your child cannot be forced to go to sleep, but they will eventually become tired and go to sleep. If your child ends up sleeping on the floor in their daytime clothes, this is OK.

Playing and Talking in the Bedroom After Bedtime

Your child may be loud or playful after you’ve put them to bed. For every night that children stay up late, put them to bed 15 minutes earlier the next night.

On nights your child goes to sleep without a fuss, praise your child the next morning.

Wandering or Prowling About During the Night

Some children awaken during the night and move about the house getting into trouble. They may raid the refrigerator, watch TV or turn on the stove or water faucet. Unlike sleepwalkers, they are awake.

Because of safety issues it is important to safety proof your home. For example, keep sharp objects out of reach of children or locked away. If children are out of bed late at night place them back into bed.

Also, praise children for staying in bed throughout the night.

Adapted from “Your Child’s Health,” by B.D. Schmitt, MD

Area VI: Phillip and Nancy Volmer

When Nancy Volmer befriended a teenage boy who was a student at the school where she worked, she and Phillip probably didn’t realize how that act of compassion would change their lives. This young man had experienced many placement disruptions, but the Volmers made a commitment to not give up on him. They understand the demands of caring for a teen who has been traumatized, and they demonstrate their perseverance by participating in counseling, as a family, working together to support this young man’s growth and development. They have invested their hearts in his journey. They also contribute to the success of new resource parents by regularly participating in OK PRIDE resource parent panels. Their insights and reassurance provide encouragement for others who want to make a difference in the life of a child.

Congratulations to these six outstanding Resource Families of the Year, 2009. They are wonderful role models for other resource families, and shining examples in their own communities. They receive the medical care and educational support that they need, and they support the birth family as well, through regular visits and mentoring.

The Gardenhires are modest people who don’t talk about their extraordinary efforts to help children, but their worker knows about the sleepless nights comforting a child with nightmares, their patience in caring for a child who starts fires and is verbally abusive or a child’s birthmother who asked Mollie to be in the delivery room when she gave birth to a new baby. Their worker says that Harlan and Mollie have never requested a child to be moved, and they never refuse a child, regardless of age or behavior. This family ensures that the children receive the medical care and educational support that they need, and they support the birth family as well, through regular visits and mentoring.

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Area V: Harlan and Mollie Gardenhire

are effective team members with OKDHS child welfare staff, working together to support the child’s goal of reunification.

Orville and Elaine Mitchell have spent their lifetimes earning the Foster Care Association of Oklahoma’s Champions of Children Award for 2009. Both have a long professional history in the child welfare field, and their three biological children cannot remember a time when foster children were not a part of their family. Following their parents’ example, the Mitchell’s two adult daughters remain actively involved with the teen girls in the Mitchell’s specialized community home, and Mindy, along with Orville, train the OK PRIDE pre-service workshops for new resource parents.

Three decades of dedication and commitment to children and young people in Oklahoma’s child welfare system has won them the honor of Champions for Children, and the admiration and appreciation of all who know them.

Their award was presented at the Oklahoma Pathways to Adulthood Together We Can! Foster Parent Awards Breakfast on April 9, 2009, by Lana Freeman, Foster Care Association of Oklahoma President.
To commemorate National Foster Care Month in May, the OKDHS Children and Family Services Division recognized six outstanding OKDHS resource families, one family representing each Area of the state, as OKDHS Resource Parents of the Year for 2009.

The award ceremony took place at the Foster Care Association of Oklahoma’s annual breakfast at the Oklahoma Pathways to Adulthood Together We Can! Conference in April, at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City.

These six families have distinguished themselves through their outstanding service to the mission of OKDHS’ child welfare system.

Area I: Joe and Michelle Blankenship

The Blankenshops serve as an excellent model of Bridge resource parenting. Over the past six years, the couple has demonstrated commitment and acceptance to 23 children placed in their home. Understanding the significance of a child’s connections to the important people in their life, Joe and Michelle make time for family visits, share school work and pictures with the birth family and maintain a relationship with children who have been reunited with their families or adopted. The couple is active in their local resource parent support group and volunteer as respite care for other resource parents. Their enthusiasm and dedication to the children in their home present a very positive image of foster care to their community.

Area II: Richard and Elaine Sandy

The Sandys can be counted on to open their home and heart to children in crisis. Their dedication to meeting the medical needs of children who have lived with them has a taken to a child for treatment to another state when necessary, to support extensive rehabilitation therapy and to seek out community resources when a special wheelchair was needed. The couple practice the Bridge value of maintaining a child’s demeanor and behavior. This Bridge resource family is committed to working with birth families even in challenging cases, and they continued on page 7

OKDHS Resource Parents of the Year Nominate

Spotlight on Support Groups

Support groups can be a resource parent’s lifeline, a safety net, an extended family or just a great place to meet with people who understand. In addition to providing a forum for questions and answers, good conversation, refreshments and fun, the support group can also offer an educational program. A knowledgeable speaker can be invited to present on a relevant topic or facilitate a discussion, and when approved in advance, participants can earn in-service training credit. The support groups listed here, one selected from each area, serve as a sampling of the wonderful groups serving resource parents all around the state. Visit your local support group, or start a new group in your area.

Area I serving Wood, Alfalfa and Major counties

Contacts: Tonya Randle, president – 580-431-2206
Debbie Darr, OKDHS 580-430-3100
Location: The Christian Church in Cherokee
Date: The third Thursday of each month, at 6:30 p.m.
Educational program, potluck supper and child care provided

Area II serving Carter county

Contacts: Southern Oklahoma Foster/Adoptive Parent Association Jennifer Brewer, president 580-229-9502
Susan Riddle, vice president 580-224-9440
Call to find out more about future meeting dates.

Area III serving Oklahoma county

Contacts: Sandina Dickman, president – 405-320-2429
Nina Levington, OKDHS 405-320-2429

OKDHS approves 2 hours of in-service training credit for each session attended.

Goldblum and Children

Outstanding dedication to the children in their care distinguish this resource family. The Lockharts routinely care for five or six children, and every child placed in their home seems to thrive. Michael and Dolores demonstrate that love and respect can positively impact a child’s demeanor and behavior. This Bridge resource family is committed to working with birth families even in challenging cases, and they

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Upcoming Educational Opportunities

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Bartlesville

A free 10-session workshop covering all aspects of raising grandchildren. Participants are encouraged, but not required, to attend the entire series. Free child care is provided.

Workshop dates: July 28, August 4, August 11, August 18, August 25, September 1.
Location: Disciples of Christ Church, 5800 SE Douglas Lane Registration: Call Mary – 918-336-1453
OKDHS approves 2 hours of in-service training credit for each session attended.

North American Council on Adoptable Children’s 35th Annual Conference

Family Connections: Roots of Success in Columbus, Ohio August 13 through 16, 2009
To learn more about the conference, visit the NACAC Web site, www.nacac.org. Check with your resource or adoption specialist about in-service training credit for conference participation.
Resources for Resource Parents

Online games – There are many Web sites that offer free educational games, puzzles and activities for children and young people. Search out interesting Web sites to liven up long summer days. Some examples are:  
• creativekidsathome.com – Crafts and activities for children  
• pitara.com – Crafts, art, science and news for children  
• http://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/youth – Garden activities for children and young people

Online education guide – “It’s My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training” gives professionals and advocates a guide to help young people from foster care prepare academically, financially, and emotionally for postsecondary education and training success. To download the PDF, go to www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/IMLPostsecondaryEd.htm  

Tips on Effective Discipline for Children and Youth

1. First, understand the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline teaches self-control and self-responsibility. Punishment relies on fear, humiliation and sometimes emotional or physical pain to control behavior.

2. Teaching techniques, such as rewards, privileges and praise, encourage positive behavior.

3. Rewards may be small gestures of approval, such as treats, toys, stickers or money. Rewards are given for interest, desire and effort on the part of the child – not for performance, talent or ability. Rewards are not the same things as bribes, and must not be over-used.

4. Privileges allow the child to experience greater opportunity and increased responsibility. They are used to encourage a child.

5. Rewards may be communicated with a smile, words or body language.

6. Establish expectations through setting and explaining rules and modeling. Clearly communicated expectations provide structure for the child.

7. Modify the child’s environment by removing sources of distraction and over-stimulation, and establishing routines and consistency in day-to-day living.

8. To help a child learn self-control, develop rules that allow the child to know what is acceptable and what is not, how certain things should be done, and how to respond to certain problems.

9. Use time-out to provide space between the child and a situation where the child’s behavior is unacceptable, or the situation is dangerous. A guideline is one minute of time-out per year of age of the child.

10. Natural consequences are more likely to be just what happens. For example, if a child leaves something outside overnight, after repeating reminders, he may suffer the natural consequence of its being ruined by the rain. Natural consequences may never be used if a child’s safety or well-being would be at risk.

It’s important to remember that:
• all methods of discipline must be appropriate to the developmental age, not the chronological age, of the child, and that
• one form of discipline may be effective for one child, but not another.

Be creative, sensitive and kind, keeping in mind that your goal is to teach the child to govern himself and to learn how to make good decisions. Children need to learn these crucial skills for themselves as well as the next generation. When they reach the parenting stage of their life, your good example will be their model.