Effective Management of Crisis Behavior

Foster and adopt kids are often an especially vulnerable group of people. Their life experiences are different from those people who have known love, understanding, and consistency. Kids in care have unmet needs and have often experienced multiple losses and stress.

Behavior is an expression of a feeling or an attempt to meet a need. *Crisis* is a time of social, emotional and physical distress that temporarily impairs a child's ability to cope.

Our response to the crisis should be to help develop the youth's self-control, self-worth, independence, and responsibility for his or her behavior. The following are guidelines for what to do before, during and after a crisis.

The three stages of crisis include:

1. **The events in a child or adolescent's life are causing stress or agitation, but there is no current crisis.** As the caregiver, you should assess what the child is feeling and try to recognize signals (pacing, speaking loudly, withdrawing, sweating, fidgeting, reverting to past behaviors, etc).

   Example: Your foster daughter is stressed because she has just learned that her parent was arrested for possession of drugs last night, and her siblings are now living with a relative. She is yelling at you and insisting that she must go immediately to see her parent in jail. You explain that she cannot see her mom because of jail visitation rules. The child is screaming, making threats to runaway, pacing, and is near the outside door.

   Be an active listener: *"I hear that you are really angry and frustrated."* Speak calmly, assertively and respectfully. *"I understand that you feel this is very unfair."*

2. **Behavioral changes increase in the child.** This includes:
   - ❖ Being anxious, upset or fearful
   - ❖ Making demands or threats
   - ❖ Crying
   - ❖ Yelling
   - ❖ Wanting to isolate
   - ❖ Running away
   - ❖ Being physically aggressive

   You may want to suggest that your child consider other options. *"As soon as you sit down, we can discuss what is wrong. Let's figure out the best way to handle this."*

   You should remove others and dangerous items from the area and keep your distance physically.

   You can respond by giving your child time and space. "*Let's not argue, Charleen. You know that we have to follow court rules. I cannot change them. I'll give you some time to think about this. I know that you will make a good decision."*

3. **After the outburst**, your child is probably calm but may appear tired or depressed. Give the child time to process. Later ask, *"Can we talk about what upset you?"*

   Help your child recognize his feelings and behavior. If you can, try to connect them for your child. "*What were you feeling when you were yelling? How did you react when were angry?"*

   Develop a plan for new behaviors for the "next time" and practice it with your child. *"What else could you do when you are feeling angry?"*

   Try to get back to your routine and reassure him. *"I know that next time, when you get frustrated, you will talk to John or me."*

Hopefully your child will be relieved. In the future, try to notice your child using the new behaviors and compliment on its use.

In summary , learn *with* your child and the team (case manager, biological family, social worker, foster parent, respite family, therapist, psychologist, teacher) as to what triggers the child's behavioral outbursts.

Examples of triggers includes:
- ❖ Telling your child what to do,
- ❖ Being left alone
- ❖ Someone calling him or her names

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- Yelling or being exposed to loud voices or noises
- Being touched

Develop a plan with your child and the support team for various ways for the child to deal with triggers.

Examples of way to deal with triggers include:

- Giving your child choices
- Providing physical activity
- Responding in a calm voice
- Giving you and your child time to cool off

Help your children to recognize activities which will help them to calm themselves, such as:

- Writing
- Exercising
- Spending quiet time in their rooms
- Wrapping up in a blanket
- Reading
- Talking to others

Resources you can borrow from our lending library

Behavior Management with Conduct Disorder Children (tape) by James Mahoney http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4368

Fostering and Supporting Children with Disruptive Behavior (DVD) by Karol Wendt, MSW, LMFT, LCSW http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=5449

Behavior Management using Self Control by Vera Fahlberg http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4884

Assessing and Addressing Bad Behavior (tape) by Frank Kunstal. http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4366

Children with Rage: Management Techniques for Parents and Professors (tape) by Dee Paddock http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4379

Medications, Behavioral Management, and Child Welfare (book) by Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, Ph.D http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=3648

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention: The Disruptive Child (VHS): http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4428

How to Excel at Verbal Intervention (VHS): http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=3638

Parenting with Love and Logic: http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4170

Parenting Teens with Love and Logic: http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/viewmaterial.asp?aid=4168

Other Resources

Sensible Discipline, A Handbook for Foster Families from American Foster Care Resources, Inc. http://www.afcr.com

Article by Pamela Lowe, *What the Heck Were You Thinking* from aNebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association 2007 newsletter: www.nfapa.org/Newsletter/2007_Apr-May.pdf

National Voice of Foster Parents: www.nfpainc.org.

Article by Debi Grebenik *Preventing Disruption: the Challenge We All Face*www.ffta.org/publications/focus_archives/2006_fall.pdf from the Foster Family Based Treatment Association

Love and Logic: http://loveandlogic.com

Crisis Prevention Institute: ww.crisisprevention.com

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