The Teen Years: Brain Development and Trauma Recovery

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Teens who have experienced adoption or foster care have faced a lot of change: healing from trauma, coping with major life transitions, developing new routines, and experiencing puberty—just to name a few. As parents and caregivers, our role is to provide young adults with a safe space to explore, stumble, and succeed in this time of self-discovery by developing parenting strategies that prioritize family connection and establish trust.

Adolescence, Trauma, and the Brain

The brain dictates all of human behavior, from automatic responses like breathing to making small talk or laughing at jokes. So understanding how to build connections with teens requires understanding how age and past experiences can alter a brain over a lifetime—and how those brain changes affect behavior.

In adolescence, for example, the brain undergoes significant changes that affect a teen’s understanding of self and the world around them. As teens move into adulthood, they face increased independence, more intimate relationships, challenging and significant decisions, and other major life transitions.

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The Cost of Caring Secondary Traumatic Stress and the Impact of Working with High-Risk Children and Families

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Introduction Each year, millions of children are exposed to some form of severe traumatic event. Many of these children are victims of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. Many thousands more have been traumatized by natural disasters (e.g., tornados, hurricanes, floods), automobile accidents, drowning, community violence or interpersonal violence they witness in their own homes. The trauma suffered by these children is not benign. It can result in serious and chronic emotional and behavioral problems that are very difficult to treat. And each year, day after day thousands of teachers, caseworkers, police officers, judges, pediatricians and child mental health professionals work with and try to help these children. And each year, parents, grandparents, foster parents care for these children.

All too often the adults are working in difficult, resource-limited situations. The children may present with a host of problems that can confuse or overwhelm their caregivers and treaters. The pain and helplessness of these children can be passed on to those around them. Listening to children talk about the trauma, trying to work in a complicated, frustrating and often “insensitive” system, feeling helpless when trying to heal these children – all can make the adults working with these children vulnerable to develop their own emotional or behavioral problems.

The purpose of this booklet is to present an overview of the topic of secondary trauma. The goal would be a better understanding of how to better serve the children we work with by making sure we are at our best. The better we understand how working with traumatized children affects us both personally and professionally the better able we will be to serve them. In order to remain emotionally healthy ourselves it is critically important that we understand how the elements of a child’s trauma of children can be absorbed. All professionals working with traumatized children can learn approaches and strategies to protect themselves from being emotionally overwhelmed by this work. In the end, the ability to help traumatized children depends upon our ability to stay emotionally healthy and motivated in difficult and often very frustrating situations. Continue Reading