

MARCH 26, 2019

HOW NATURE MAKES KIDS HEALTHIER, SMARTER

By Dr. Laura Markham

"It's so peaceful out there and the air smells so good....It's like you're free when you go out there. It's your own time. Sometimes I go outside when I'm mad -- and then, just with the peacefulness, I'm better. I come back home happy, and my mom doesn't even know why."

"Something else was different when we were young: our parents were outdoors. I'm not saying they were joining health clubs and things of that sort, but they were out of the house, out on the porch, talking to neighbors. As far as physical fitness goes, today's kids are the sorriest generation in the history of the United States. Their parents may be out jogging, but the kids just aren't outside." — Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Did you grow up as I did, building dams in the stream, climbing trees, and chasing fireflies as the evening darkened? If you did, you'll agree with me that all children deserve those experiences.

Nowadays, though, many of us don't have yards. Even if we do, when we try to send our kids outside, there's often no one to play with. And most parents worry that we have to stay outside with them to keep them safe - but we have to make dinner!

[Click To Continue](#)

Getting Myself Back: Living in Foster Care with People Who Let Me Be a Child

By: Anonymous

"Don't touch that. Put that down," my stepfather said to my little sister Donna as she cleaned the toilet. "You're too pretty for that; you're my little princess. Where's Leah? Make her do it."

I overheard this from a few yards away, where I was hiding behind the bunk beds. I was hiding so I wouldn't get hit and made to do more grown folks' work.

It had been like that since I was 6, when Donna was born. That's when I began performing the tasks of a parent. My mom frequently threatened to leave me in an orphanage and told me that my life there would be 10 times worse. Meanwhile my mother and my stepfather, Fred, put up barriers and fake smiles to make us look like a normal family.

Not everyone bought the act. In elementary school, I was put on the watch list of kids who misbehaved. My counselor often asked, "Leah, is everything OK at home?"

I replied with a shrug, "Why wouldn't it be?" Thinking of the orphanage threat, I kept quiet.

I haven't seen my biological father since I was 4, but my mom brought him into the conversation when I misbehaved in school. She would hit me with questions she knew I couldn't answer, like: "You think your dad cares if you act like this?" Or, "Being stupid isn't going to make him come back; you know that, right?" These questions never ceased to throw me off. She made me feel like it was my fault he wasn't in my life.

My mother got together with Fred when I was 4. They quickly had Donna, then Rajon, then Anthony. Fred treated me differently, I think because I was the only kid in the house who wasn't his. He and my mother turned a first grader into a maid. I did the housework: I swept and washed and bathed and dressed the kids. The adults did most of the cooking.

The dishes were my worst enemy. They would pile in the sink and on the counters and table for weeks. Often there were rogue bowls to take from the bedrooms to the sink. Mold spores grew on the plates while they sat in pools of sticky, stagnant water, drawing flies until my mom made me wash them.

Fred was an electrician, and unless he had a day off, he would be gone before we woke and back around dinner. My mother was a nurse in a senior center, but she lost her job when I was around 10. After that, she often left me alone with my siblings during the day and would wake me in the night to tell me she'd be back in the morning. I don't know where she went.

Even though I bathed and fed the kids and helped them with their homework, I didn't feel respected in that family. I was a kid, too, and sometimes I'd fight with my brothers and sister. My parents took my siblings' word over mine, so I got in trouble when we had conflict. [Click Here to Read More](#)



Four Things

ALL FOSTER YOUTH SHOULD DO

Before They Turn 18

By Mary Lee

If you were a typical teenager, turning 18 meant finishing high school, proms and parties, college trips...You probably felt some trepidation, but more excitement and anticipation...and you knew that 18 really was just a number. Your parents were still helping you make important decisions and providing an emotional and financial safety net to catch you in case you made a mistake.

For the more than 22,000 young people who turn 18 in foster care this year in the United States, approaching the age of official adulthood is a different matter. Decisions they make may have a profound impact on their success as young adults. They have no safety net.

[VIEW THESE FOUR IMPORTANT TIPS](#)

Coping With Incarceration

The incarceration of a loved one can be overwhelming for both children and caregivers. Because of the feeling of stigma, it takes special effort to start important conversations and answer kids' questions. But parents can comfort children and guide them through difficult moments just by talking. With love and support, the family can cope with the challenges of incarceration together.

[Click Here to View More Material](#)



My Happy Pack

Children enter foster care for many reasons. Frequently a child can not safely return home for several months. A lot can happen in the life of a two-year-old, a seven-year-old or even an 11-year-old in a short amount of time. A two-year-old may begin putting a few words together to form sentences. A seven-year-old may get a good-behavior note from a teacher. An 11-year-old could score the winning goal in a game that they are especially proud of. Imagine being the biological parents and missing out on so many of these things.

At the same time, you as the foster parent may be busy and won't necessarily remember, between visits, what special little everyday kinds of things have happened with the child. **My Happy Pack is a plan to help the child share with their biological parents those special things that have happened since their last family interaction.**

To help make family interactions more meaningful, a foster parent can create a "My Happy Pack" for the child in your care with any type of bag or backpack. Between family interactions the child can be encouraged to put things into this bag that they are excited to share with their biological parents. **Here are some examples of items that could be included:**

- A favorite book
- Something cute or funny that the child said that you have wrote on a piece of paper
- New words the child is saying, if it's a younger child
- A picture the child drew or colored
- A note from the child's teacher or an assignment the child is proud of
- A snapshot of the child doing a favorite activity
- A letter the child has written to their birth parents

My Happy Pack gives biological parents a place to start their interactions; it lets them know what their child has been doing since the last family interaction, and allows the biological parent an opportunity to feel more involved in their child's life. And the child will be very proud and excited to share their proud moments since their last visit.