Helping Youth Transition to Adulthood: Guidance for Foster Parents

The transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency can be challenging for any young person. For teenagers who have been living in foster care, the transition to life outside of care can be daunting. Generally, youth who have experienced foster care do not have the same safety nets and support networks as others their age, and the transition challenges can be even greater.

As a foster parent, you can help youth in your care prepare for these challenges, but remember that the knowledge and skills they need cannot be learned at the last minute as they exit care. It is crucial for foster parents and other caring adults in youths’ lives to begin supporting them through the transition process well before they leave care, beginning in adolescence or even earlier. This factsheet provides guidance on how you can help youth build a foundation for a successful transition to adult life outside of foster care. It describes the challenges youth face, how the adolescent brain affects them during this time, and Federal laws and programs as well as provides concrete ways you can partner with youth.

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New Ways of Treating Trauma: Try Some Yoga

When a person experiences traumatic events, the aftermath can be extremely debilitating. Trauma not only affects the mind, but can have lifelong effects on the body.

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk is a psychiatrist who has been treating people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other types of trauma for more than 40 years. He founded the Trauma Center in Brookline, Mass., and is author of the new book "The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma" (read an excerpt below).

He tells Here & Now's Jeremy Hobson about new ways to treat trauma, focusing on ways to making the body feel safe.

Interview Highlights

What is trauma?

"Trauma is an experience that overwhelms your capacity to cope. People feel helpless, overwhelmed, scared, horrified; at the core of trauma is horror."

On how yoga heals trauma

"It's not one size fits all. You need to find some way where your body once again feels like ‘I am in control of myself.’" Dr. Bessel van der Kolk

"I didn't practice yoga myself and then we saw all these abnormalities in people's heart rate, their breathing patterns, the way they relate to their bodies. It was very clear that their bodies were on fire, their bodies felt deeply unsafe, so the enemy that was once living outside was now living within. And you need to befriend your body, you need to calm your body down."

"Yoga was more effective than any medication... medication can be quite nice to sort of dampen some of the symptoms. But in the end, people need to own their bodies, they need to own their physical experiences. And, in order to overcome your trauma, it needs to be safe to go inside and to experience yourself."

What there is too much emphasis on is the capacity of the cognitive rational brain to conquer our irrational survival brain. Neuroscience has really helped us understand that you can’t talk yourself out of being in love, or being angry, or hating particular people because these are not rational processes, and reason has only very limited capacities to override these more primitive survival issues. And so, you need to not rely on reason, you need rely on mastery of your body, safety of your body, finding peace in your body."

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