

Leadership Village Press Publications

OUR HOME : YOUR HOME

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UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH YOUR FOSTER CHILD - ONE

First things first:

This guide is divided into three workbooks. First you learn about abused and neglected children. You see how to do a quick check to tell if your foster child has problems you can help with. After that, you learn how to help your foster child with stress, low self-esteem, and with learning and school problems.

In the second workbook, you learn more about abused and neglected children and their special problems. The workbook starts with a quick check to see how your parenting relationship is going with your foster child. You then learn how to help foster children get along better with other people and how to help them with their behavior problems. After that, you learn about helping foster children who are suicidal and those who are mentally ill.

In workbook three you learn to be culturally sensitive and responsive to foster children placed with you. You learn about cultural elements, cultural differences, and prejudice. You then learn about cultural ingredients and outcomes and how they can be either desirable or undesirable. Using cultural elements from several groups, you learn how to evaluate the elements. You then learn how to get to know your foster child's culture. You learn what you need to observe, what questions to ask, and what you should tell him about your culture.

Getting started:

Your foster child comes to your home with her strong points and special problems. It is hard for any child to adjust to a new family; but for your foster child, it is extra tough. If her past family experiences had been positive and healthy, being her foster parent would be fairly easy. Loving her and giving her a chance to live in your home would be enough. It is sad but true that love and a good home are not enough for her.

Your foster child is with you because she could not stay where she was. Maybe she was abused. She may have been neglected. There might have been other problems that made it impossible for her to stay with her family. Whatever happened, she was not safe, happy, and getting her needs met. She now has more problems than most children.

Learning about her special problems is your first step. You will love her, care about her, and encourage her. That's just the way you are. At your home, she also can count on help with her problems, whatever they are. She will get what she needs, whatever it takes.

Children who are abused and neglected:

Abuse and neglect cause lifelong problems. Being mistreated hurts children in ways you can see and in ways you cannot see. They suffer at the time and will have problems at later life-stages. Although the harm done may not be easy to see, it is there. The child's physical health and development are the most visible problem areas. Sometimes the child's emotional, social, sexual, and mental problems are even worse. These activities will help you think about how abuse and neglect damage children.

Activity One:

Here are some things that make it more likely a child will be abused or neglected. For each, think about why it makes abuse and neglect more likely.

For example, a child's being under three-years-old makes abuse more likely.

Why? Why would a baby be more likely to be abused than a twelve-year-old?

Another example may help. Child abuse is more likely in families where an adult abuses alcohol or drugs.

Why? Why are children in homes where someone abuses alcohol or drugs more likely to be abused?

Please write in the space after each point. Put a note or short sentence about why it makes it more likely for a child to be abused or neglected.

- Child is under three-years-old.
Why?

- Child is hard to love.
Why?

- Child was abused before.
Why?

- Parent was abused as a child.
Why?

- Signs of abuse you can see such as bruises, burns, scars, broken bones, or broken teeth.
Why?

- Alcohol/drug abuse in the family.
Why?

- Child is aggressive or destructive.
Why?

- Child does not care if someone gets hurt or gets upset.
Why?

- Child is very cautious and uneasy around adults.
Why?

- Child gets almost no attention from parents.
Why?

- Parents are not consistent about what they expect from the child.
Why?

- Child is very withdrawn or quite passive around people.
Why?

- Child has a handicap or disability.
Why?

- Child is very hard to manage.
Why?

- There is a lot of family stress.
Why?
- People in the home are violent or hurting each other.
Why?
- Family is cut off from other people and does not have a support system or people who will help.
Why?

Activity Two:

In Activity One, you thought about things that make it more likely for a child to be abused. In this activity, think about those children who have already been abused or neglected. Here are some problems children have after they are abused or neglected.

How do abuse and neglect cause these problems? Write your ideas after each point.

- Slow physical development.
How?
- Slow development of language skills.
How?
- Slow social and emotional development.
How?
- Learning problems.
How?
- Poor coordination.
How?

- Problems getting along with other children.
How?

A quick check:

Here is how to check quickly to see if your foster child is having problems. The checklist helps you think about behavior and adjustment problems your foster child may have.

Is your foster child having problems? Does the youngster seem to be getting along well; or do you see behavior or other problems that concern you?

Trust your good judgement and experience. Think about your foster child and answer Yes or No to these questions. It works as a quick check. The questions you answer No show you where the problems are.

Circle Y or N.

Is your foster child:

1. Y N In good health and not often ill?
2. Y N Usually energetic and interested in what is going on in his/her world?
3. Y N Normally relaxed and comfortable with him/herself?
4. Y N Self-confident in most situations?
5. Y N Eating regularly in normal amounts?
6. Y N Staying away from alcohol or other drugs?
7. Y N Happy and in a good mood most of the time?
8. Y N Well-behaved most of the time?
9. Y N Managing his/her anger and temper responsibly?
10. Y N Feeling successful most of the time?
11. Y N Responsible and dependable most of the time?

12. Y N Dealing well with most day-to-day stresses and pressures?
13. Y N Making and keeping friends his/her age?
14. Y N Involved with friends who you know and approve of?
15. Y N Going to school regularly?
16. Y N Doing well in school?
17. Y N Finishing homework and other assignments on time?
18. Y N Cooperating with teachers and others at school?
19. Y N Involved in school activities and projects?
20. Y N Talking with you and other adults about his/her activities, friends, and problems?

Now that you have answered the questions, how do you decide if your foster child has problems that need extra help? If you answered Yes to each question, your foster child is doing fine. If not, the child's problems need extra attention. Talk first with the child to see what he or she thinks and feels about the problems. Also, talk about the problems with the youngster's caseworker, case manager, or doctor.

Helping your foster child with stress:

Stress is usually not much of a problem for children. At times, a little stress is good for them and keeps them sharp. Young people can normally think things through and figure them out for themselves. They can usually handle their feelings whether they are feeling good or not. They can do what they need to do. They have some stress but handle it fine.

Children can have more stress than they can handle. Foster children almost always have too much stress. When they do, you see signs their stress is getting to them. Here are some typical signs.

1. They are restless and have trouble calming down.

Children can be restless and unable to calm down when they are just full of energy. They are only being very active. It is really hard to sit still, stand still, or be still. Their problem is not stress, it is having to be calm and quiet.

School and the dinner table are good examples. The only stress is adults who expect them to quit fooling around. The children are just being children. The adults are the ones with the stress.

This is the real problem. When restlessness and trouble calming down are because of stress, it does not feel good. The young person is having thoughts and feelings that are keeping him upset. He is confused and feels afraid, angry, and frustrated at the same time. He cannot manage these thoughts and feelings very well and is up-tight and uneasy.

If you see this sign in your foster child, here is what to do. Think about whether the child has a problem or you have a problem coping with his energy and normal behavior. If the problem is yours, tell him about your problem. "I want to talk with you about slowing down and settling down a little, especially at dinner and when we are having quiet time in the evening. You are too rambunctious; and I find it hard to handle."

If you think the child is restless and having trouble calming down because of stress, first give him a little more space. Be a little more patient and tolerant. Say, "I can tell you have a lot on your mind. I will give you as much time and space as you need to work it out. If you want to talk, I'm here for you."

If he does not get more relaxed in a few days, get a little more insistent. Say, "Whatever you are struggling with seems like a big problem for you. I cannot tell whether you are winning or the stress is winning. It's time to talk. Let me help. I know the two of us can handle any problem better than either of us by ourselves. Can we talk?"

If he refuses to talk, keep trying. Not right then but from time-to-time and at least once a day. Don't get frustrated and up-tight just because he will not talk to you. Helping a youngster with stress can be stressful. Be a good example of how to manage stress.

2. They have trouble concentrating and paying attention.

This sign of stress is a lot like restlessness and trouble calming down; but it is more of a problem for the youngster. Some children (about 1 in 30) have a condition called Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder or ADHD. These young people have abnormal problems concentrating and paying attention. Although this probably is not your foster child's problem, make it your first idea. Why? If the child has ADHD, he can do nothing about it by himself. Only a physician or psychologist can diagnose it for sure. It then needs managed medically, behaviorally, and through special teaching and learning techniques. The child cannot handle ADHD without help.

At home and school, problems concentrating and paying attention often are read wrong by adults. They read them as daydreaming and not paying attention. A parent or teacher might say, "She spends all her time daydreaming, not paying attention, fooling around, and wasting time." When

misread this way, a stress problem can get overlooked. If this happens, the child is more likely to be punished than helped.

Also think about this. Have you ever had to be somewhere that was uninteresting, boring, and no fun? What if it were even worse? You have trouble understanding anything being said and do not know what is happening. Are you getting the picture?

What if you are told it is important and good for you? What if you are told you will understand how important it really is in ten or twenty or thirty years? What if you are told you will be in trouble if you don't pay attention and make the most of the opportunity? What will it take to get you to concentrate and pay attention? Children are in these kinds of situations often and do about as well or as badly as adults do. Before you take any action, think about how reasonable you are being when you expect the child to concentrate and pay attention.

Most children who have trouble concentrating and paying attention because of stress are ignored. Even worse for them, they are treated as if they were misbehaving. What's more, teachers and parents think they were misbehaving on purpose.

What can you do to help? Look for explanations. If your foster child often has trouble concentrating and paying attention, ADHD needs to be checked out. The problem may only come up at school or when the child has to listen carefully or read. If so, consider a learning problem. You may see the sign mostly when the youngster has no choice about where to be or what to do. If so, think about how hard it is to pretend to be interested or to act like you care when you don't.

If the problem comes up and you had not noticed it before or if it is getting worse, stress is the cause. Talk with your foster child. "I am concerned about you. It seems like you are having trouble concentrating and paying attention. I noticed this when you were working on your homework, just as an example. It seems like you have a lot on your mind. It's hard to concentrate when we are thinking about important stuff. It's a problem for me sometimes too. Can we talk about what is getting to you?"

3. They have trouble going to sleep and wake up during the night.

As with most problems, this sign is usually not very important unless it goes on for a while. Children usually go to sleep in about fifteen minutes to an hour. The average is around twenty minutes or so. Some youngsters go to sleep quickly and others take a little longer to settle down and fall asleep. It is only a problem if it takes a lot longer than is usual for your foster child. If this happens several nights in a row or if the youngster cannot fall asleep for three or four hours some night, there might be a problem. Excitement, not feeling tired, and thinking about day-to-day kinds of things also can keep children awake as they can adults. Do not make too much of it. Still, be open to the possibility of too much stress.

Waking up during the night once in a while is not a problem either. Everyone does this sometimes. Usually, it is from dreaming or from needing to go to the bathroom. Not going back to sleep fairly quickly is more of a problem. When the youngster often wakes up but cannot go back to sleep easily, stress is a problem.

Consider this. The child may be afraid to go to sleep; and if he wakes up, going back to sleep also may be scary. Why? Much abuse, especially sexual abuse, happens at night. Family violence often happens at night. Children who live in homes where there are rats would understandably be afraid to sleep. Think about why your foster child might be afraid.

If the child's sleeping does not improve in two or three weeks, arrange for an evaluation and maybe counseling. When the child is taking his stress to bed with him, he needs some extra help.

4. They have bad dreams and nightmares.

Stress can be a problem for your foster child all the time or just once in a while. It also can be mild or more serious. As it gets worse, the child's fear, anger, and frustration start to take over. At this level, stress is with the child whether he is awake or asleep.

A bad dream or restless night once in a while are no big deal. Even a nightmare on rare occasion is not something to worry about. Here is the problem. If the bad dreams happen often and especially if they are bad enough to call nightmares, the child has a real problem with stress.

There are some things you can do to help. First, encourage the child to have a quiet time before bed. You can talk with him for fifteen or twenty minutes about something positive and not stressful. The idea is to help him slow down and calm down before trying to go to sleep.

See if sometime during the day you can get the child to talk with you about his fears and frustrations. Talking is always the best medicine for stress. Talking about the dreams or nightmares will not help much.

Help her learn to wake completely up after a bad dream and especially after a nightmare. Encourage her to try to go to the bathroom and to come wake you up. Your reassurance while she is still afraid will help. Talking about something to get her mind off the dream often is just the right help.

If things do not get better in a couple weeks, counseling is necessary. Also, there is a problem called night-terrors. They are not exactly nightmares. With this problem, the child's fear is extreme and it is very hard to get him to wake up. Often, the child sleep-walks during a night-terror. He may give you the feeling he is awake. These terrors always need checked by a doctor. The child probably will get medicine for his stress.

5. They have headaches.

Headaches caused by stress and tension are unusual for children. They are only a little more common in teens. When a child has a headache, it is most likely caused by a minor illness, allergies, problems seeing, or getting too hot or tired. If you notice the child has a headache more than once a month or so, it needs checked by his doctor. Of course, if the headache is severe or lasts for more than a couple of hours, check with the youngster's caseworker or call his doctor. The point is this. Rule out possible medical causes before considering stress.

6. They have upset stomachs.

Like headaches, a child's upset stomach is probably caused by something other than stress. It may be from eating too much or eating something that disagreed with the child. A minor illness, needing to go to the bathroom, or not feeling well may be the cause. If the discomfort is not severe or continuing, rest, a little sympathy, and some personal space are usually right on target.

An upset stomach is more likely to be caused by stress than are headaches. When the sign is caused by stress, the child is up-tight and afraid about something or someone. Gently encouraging him to talk about what is wrong usually helps a lot.

If talking is not easy for him, try this. Say, "I'll bet your stomach is telling us you are afraid or a little up-tight about something or someone. Does it have something to do with things here at home, or at school, or maybe with your friends?" If this does not work, try, "We can talk about what's getting to you. Do you want to talk about your family?"

If this gets a response, listen but be careful not to pass judgement. Do not criticize the child or his family.

7. They cry easily and might have crying spells.

This problem works much like stomach aches, although the feelings are usually stronger and more confusing for the child. Try giving him a little more space. Do not push too hard to get him to talk. You want him to know it is okay to sometimes cry and feel upset. Ask if he wants to talk about the painful thoughts and feelings. If not, give him a little time and space and then go back quietly to sit for a few minutes and maybe talk. If his crying goes on for more than a couple days, try to get him to talk with his case manager or maybe with a counselor.

Also consider this. The child may be ill or in pain. It might be he has learned it is better to suffer through it than to tell an adult. Past adult reactions may not have been helpful. Even worse, the reaction may have been worse for him than just suffering through it.

8. They lose their tempers easily and quickly.

This may be the hardest sign of stress for you to handle. It also is the easiest to misunderstand. If you are like most adults, you react by getting angry yourself. This reaction is followed by trying to stop the child's behavior. With other signs of stress, it is easier to see the child's unhappy feelings and frustration. Also, it is not so hard to respond to the feelings instead of reacting to the behavior. With temper and anger, you can find yourself reacting to the child's angry behavior and not responding to her feelings at all.

The best response is hard. Her temper outburst will run its course. If she is not hitting someone or breaking things, the outburst does not hurt anything. Don't get into an argument with her. Don't yell or make threats.

Calmly say, "I can see you are angry. You have a right to feel how you feel. I am going to wait here with you until you get it out however much you need to blow." Now stop talking. Wait until the child starts quieting down and calming down.

When it gets a little quieter, say, "Being angry is okay sometimes. Losing your temper does not work very well for any of us. You are trying very hard to tell me something important. Please try again. When your temper is not getting in the way, I can hear and understand better. What has you so angry?"

Whatever it is, do not react, blame the child, give advice, or defend yourself or anyone else. You might say, "Thank you for sharing that with me. I will think about it and we can talk about it a little later." Just be sure to think about it and do go back to the child later and offer to talk about her frustrations and concerns.

Example:

Cathy felt restless and could not get herself to calm down. She could not concentrate on anything and was feeling the start of a headache. The past few nights, she had tossed and turned for an hour or two before falling asleep. Last night, she woke up several times and it took forever to go back to sleep. Waking up was not that bad; but the bad dreams upset her and kept her from going back to sleep. She could not get them off her mind.

Between feeling tired and her headache, there was no way she could pay attention to what her foster mother was saying. "Calm down," Cathy told herself. "I think I'm going to be sick." She thought her upset stomach was because of something she ate but the more upset she got, the

worse it got. "Don't start crying again. I've got to get out of here," she screamed to herself as she turned and ran out of the room.

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete the Brief Treatment Plan below. What signs of stress do you see? Write the sign of stress in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Helping your foster child with low self-esteem:

What is self-esteem? It is who children think they are. You can see it in how they treat themselves. It is there when they feel valued and important. It is missing when they feel unworthy or put themselves down.

Self-esteem can be high or low. When children think they are important and valued, their self-esteem is high. When they feel good about themselves, are comfortable with who they are, and like themselves, their self-esteem is high. When they treat themselves with respect and avoid doing things that are not good for them, their self-esteem is high.

What is low self-esteem? Children have bad thoughts about themselves. They do not think they are worthwhile people who will be successful. They do not feel good about who they are. This makes them sad and angry. They do not take care of themselves and they do things that are not good for them.

Here is the important part. Children have good days and bad days. Sometimes their self-esteem is higher and sometimes lower. It depends on how things are going for them at the time. Low self-

esteem is only a serious problem if your foster child gets extremely down on himself. More so if he is down on himself most of the time.

Here is the main problem. Abuse and neglect are killers when it comes to self-esteem. Foster children have low self-esteem. It is as simple and as tragic as that. It may be harder to see in younger children but is hard to miss in older foster children. Keep this in mind as you think about these signs of low self-esteem.

9. They worry and fret about not doing things well enough and about failing.

Foster parents often think about this sign as a problem with school and school work. Children get nervous and upset about tests, homework, and sometimes about going to school. The problem is they think they will fail even when there is no reason for them to worry. They don't do their homework, will not participate in class, and do not risk failure. Sometimes a child with self-esteem problems will do her homework but not turn it in. The risk of teachers and parents getting upset is not as bad as failing.

Self-esteem problems can get worse. The young person worries and frets about not looking good enough and may even think she looks weird. She may avoid her friends because she is afraid of being embarrassed. She may think she will fail socially, if she is not already a social failure. New people and activities are always a problem because she does not know what new ways there might be to embarrass herself or to fail. She figures almost anything or anyone may be a new chance for her to "screw up."

What is going on with your foster child? It is one of those things that is so obvious you can completely overlook it. Yes, it has to do with how the youngster thinks about and feels about herself. Here is her real problem. It has to do with how she thinks others feel about her. The problem is how she thinks they will react to her. She believes she will not be accepted. Children with low self-esteem think people do not like them. They do not think they will ever be accepted.

Is a child with low self-esteem worrying and fretting about not doing well and about failing? Yes; but more to the point, she worries more about ridicule, rejection, and angry reactions. If this were not bad enough, she knows it would be still worse to just be ignored.

A couple things will help. Problems with low self-esteem are very stressful for children. For example, worrying and fretting once in a while about failing is not that big a deal. All children do this sometimes. The problem for foster children is that they often feel like this. Their stress is severe. When you see the sign a lot in your foster child, look for signs of stress. Handle them as discussed in the last section.

When the child is working on something or thinking about doing something, don't say things like, "Don't worry. You'll do fine. You are getting upset over nothing." This only says to her you do not understand how upset and afraid she really is.

It would be better to say, "I am proud of you for taking a chance on yourself. I think it will work out fine but don't know for sure. I just want you to know I am here for you no matter how it turns out. Your being willing to try or at least thinking about it tells me you are my kind of person." You want to understand and support the child's struggle. Your support is there for her however it turns out. She is important to you. Knowing she belongs and is accepted boosts her self-esteem.

When she goes ahead and tries, point out the good points about what she does. Also do not be dishonest. Do not say she did well when it is not true. Do not tell her things are going fine when they are not. Do not try to convince the child people like her when they do not. Most important, do not try to make her think it does not matter. It does matter. You and she both know it matters a lot. Do you have enough respect and caring for her to be honest? For her to know you do is a very positive and loving thing. Within the love and honesty of your relationship, encourage her, support her, and give her ideas about how she can succeed. Above all, be there for her if things get bad.

10. They do not start anything because they are afraid it will turn out badly anyway.

Worrying and fretting is where low self-esteem starts. Just shutting down is where it leads. This is the first hurdle to get over. Children whose self-esteem is so low they will not even try are misunderstood and often dealt with in harsh and destructive ways. People see them as bull-headed, oppositional, and defiant. Their self-esteem problem looks like a behavior problem. Parents and teachers get frustrated, angry, and down on the child. It is a vicious circle. The child does not try to do things because she believes she will fail anyway. She thinks she will get bad reactions from people no matter how she does. Adults see her behavior as willful and defiant. They get upset and angry with her. This is what she thought they were going to do. It makes no difference. Bad reactions and rejection come anyway. From the child's point of view, she is someone who others react badly to. She does not have to do anything to get the bad reactions. As the saying goes, "Damned if you do and damned if you don't so why bother?"

What can you do to help? You can understand the behavior for what it is. The child does not start projects or try new things. He makes no effort to participate. He always has excuses such as "I forgot."

Managing this behavior is tough. Here is a suggestion. Your first goal is to get him to start or at least try. It is not to get him to finish or do well. Any effort he makes is a very big step in the right direction. Trying one problem, at least going to the activity, or making a little effort to do what you expect is progress.

Do not get angry. Do not threaten. Do not plead. Offer him something he wants if he will just start and at least try. This might be a small privilege, a special treat, time doing something fun with you, or anything else he values. Is this a bribe? Sure, why not? It is better for both of you than getting frustrated and upset with him.

The bribe will not always be there for the expected behavior, or will it? Sure it will. After a while, it is no longer a treat or special privilege. Your approval and the sweet taste of success reward the child's efforts. When you see how it works, you can see you often bribe and get bribed.

11. They usually give up quickly and easily.

A child with low self-esteem worries and frets about failing. She starts giving up quicker and easier. Finally, she just does not try. When your foster child is giving up quickly and easily, she is on her way to shutting down. But sometimes, giving up quickly is the last step and comes after not starting or trying.

Here is how it works. Your foster child's self-esteem has been nearly destroyed. Fretting and worrying changed to giving up quickly and easily. Criticism and angry reactions from adults caused her to give up. At some point she just quit.

The child asked herself, "What can I do?" This was her answer. "Just go through the motions. Act like you are trying. Stop as soon as they get off your back." The child is not trying to succeed. She is only trying to keep things from getting worse. She does not want to be put down and hurt.

Children whose self-esteem has been this permanently damaged need long-term help. Also, they need a home like yours. There you love them for who they are and not for how well they do. You accept your foster child on an as-is basis. You respond positively anytime she makes an effort of any kind to please.

12. They do not feel good about their physical and sexual development.

You have seen how low self-esteem starts with worrying and fretting about failing. It grows into giving up quickly. This leads to shutting down and not trying. If adult reactions are too harsh, the child goes through the motions for fear of even harsher consequences. He simply plays the game. This is a very sad way for him to think and feel about success, achievement, and participation. But low self-esteem can get still worse for him.

He feels incompetent. It is no surprise also to learn he has a low physical/sexual self-image. Most children have some uncertainty about themselves physically and sexually. Children with self-esteem problems have these thoughts all the time and feel them strongly. They think they cannot succeed. They think they cannot achieve. They also think they are not made right or well enough.

Here is the point. This poor self-image has nothing to do with how the young person really looks or is developing. The child believes it no matter what the facts are or what you tell him.

Here is how you can help. Don't try to convince him his thoughts and feelings are wrong. It will only strengthen his belief you do not understand. Say, "I feel badly you think about yourself in such bad ways. You are a normal person and are fine physically and sexually. I know you doubt that even though it is true. I want to hear what you think and feel about it; but I am not going to argue. You have a right to your feelings. Can you tell me how it feels to you?" Now use the skills you learned to help the child with stress. This leads to higher self-esteem.

13. They do not like themselves and put themselves down.

This sign makes the child's physical and sexual doubt easier to understand. It also makes it easier to see the real issue. Children believe they are who parents and other adults have told them they are. The messages may have come directly from parents. They may have come from teachers or peers. Wherever they came from, it was a world that did not support or value the child.

It is as if she steps back and watches herself. She hears people saying to her, "You are not someone I like. You are not my kind of person. There are a lot of things I do not like about you. I am here to point them out to you, every chance I get." She learned to watch herself by having to live through what others said to her and about her to others. She painfully saw how they saw her and how they treated her.

There is no way you can directly help with this kind of self-hatred. Saying, "I like you," is worth saying but does not help much. Mostly, it makes the child think you are as dumb as she feels. You are just someone else who lies to her.

Instead, the child needs a friend who cares. She needs the relationship to last a long time. The relationship is the message. It says, "You are someone worth my hanging in there with for a very long time."

In the short-term you can help some. Remember each time she puts herself down. Listen for a couple of weeks. Make note of the bad things she says about herself.

Find a quiet time to talk about your list. Say, "For the last two weeks, I have made a note every time you put yourself down. Here is the list of things you have said about yourself." Read the list to her. Wait for a minute to see if she says anything.

Next, say, "I do not see you like that. These things do not seem like you to me. I would like to get you to help me understand. If we can, I will read these to you one at a time. I would like for you to tell me why you think these things are true about you. You may want to give me an example or just explain it to me. The first thing on the list is, 'I just mess everything up.' Why do you believe that is true? Will you give me an example?"

Do not argue with her. Do not try to convince her she is wrong. Just ask questions and listen. That by itself lets her know you care and value what she has to say. Once you have listened about each put-down, you can say, "Thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. I understand how you see yourself a lot better. I don't see you in those ways at all but appreciate your being willing to help me understand."

The conversation helped the youngster's self-esteem all by itself. Also, you now have many new opportunities. Suppose your family goes to church and then to visit with some friends. Things go fine. Later that night, you talk with the child. You say, "Remember when you said you mess everything up? Well, today is an example of why I don't agree. Today was a very good day. Everything went fine. It was good to have you with us. You did not mess anything up. That makes me think you are not someone who messes everything up. I just want you to know why I think what I think." The child likely will not say anything. You have made your self-esteem point anyway.

14. They do not feel they fit in or belong anywhere.

This is the underlying problem causing your foster child's low self-esteem. He feels like he does not fit in, does not belong. This goes against what may be the most human of human needs. This is the need to belong. Children are who others tell them they are. Youngsters with very low self-esteem have heard their world telling them they do not belong anywhere. For what are usually very complex reasons, foster children are orphans of the system. More for some and less for others, they don't belong anywhere. When push comes to shove, they get shoved out.

They think they don't fit in, don't belong. As sad as it is, they are mostly right. This makes helping them with their self-esteem problems doubly tough. You need to help with their ideas about themselves that are not true. You also need to help with the ones that are true.

The child says, "I don't belong anywhere. No one wants me." What do you say? Do not say, "That is not true. You belong here and we want you." It may be true today but likely not next year or ten years from now. Better would be, "I can see how you would feel that way. I think if I had lived your life, I might feel the same way. It will not always be that way. When you are older, you can have your own family. That does not help you much right now. I feel badly for you but am not going to tell you how to feel or what to think. I am here for you today and hope it helps at least a little." You value and respect the youngster enough today to deal with the truth.

15. They do not feel loved by anyone.

This sign is one step down the self-esteem ladder from not fitting in and not belonging. It is almost all the way to the bottom.

When you are thinking about your foster child's problems, there are a couple points to consider. Most children and most adults for that matter sometimes feel unloved and unappreciated. Many feel a little like this much of the time. The feelings may be about low self-esteem. They are more likely because of unusual circumstances. When feeling unloved is a sign of damaged self-esteem, it is much more constant, much more severe, and very painful.

Your foster child says, "No one loves me. No one cares." You are tempted to say, "I love you. I care." The problem is this. Love and caring are more than feelings and nice words. They are commitment, responsibility, and a willingness to hang in there for days, months, and years. The kind of love the child wants and needs is a forever kind of thing. It is unconditional and permanent.

It would be better for you to say this. "Not feeling loved is a hard feeling to handle. I can tell it feels awful and hurts a lot. I think it would make me feel angry and afraid and other stuff at the same time. Not thinking anyone cares would feel lonely to me. How does it feel to you?" At least the child now knows you care enough to care about how she feels. That is a start.

I love you's are cheap. But when you are gentle and honest, the child learns that he matters enough to not be lied to. This is a small bit of self-esteem that will last him a lifetime. At least there was one day at your home when someone respected him enough to deal with him honestly.

16. They do not feel like someone anyone can love.

This is the bottom of the self-esteem ladder. The child has totally devalued her self. She sees herself as a zero. She has given up.

Think about how it went. It went from worrying and fretting to giving up easily. It went from not trying to self-hatred. The child now is at the end of the line.

From her point of view, they were right after all. She has no value. She is not someone anyone loves. Why? Because she is just not lovable. People may say they care. They may even pretend to love her. It is not possible for anyone to love her. She is not someone anyone should love.

When self-esteem has been this permanently destroyed, the child has a lifelong handicap. It is something from which she can never fully recover.

What can you do? Each gentle touch makes life slightly less bad for her. Each quiet moment gives her a small taste of belonging. Each time you listen says she matters a little. Each time you are sensitive and patient, she is a little less handicapped. But still the damage happened and will be there for a very long time.

Example:

"What am I doing here? I should have just stayed home. I don't belong here. I don't fit in. I don't fit in anywhere."

Richard's thoughts were rushing as he stood by himself watching the party. He wanted to join a cluster of young people talking in the kitchen but was afraid. "Even if they let me join in, I will mess up. I will just say something dumb or do something stupid and they will laugh at me. That would be worse than just standing here by myself."

He had told himself he would do better this time. This time he was going to act like he had as much of a right to be there as anyone else. This time he would not just stand around and watch everyone have a good time.

"If I were just bigger and did not look so weird I'd be fine. I'd have friends and fit in."

Later that night, Richard was sitting alone in his room at his foster home. He had left the party after a half hour or so; and no one even noticed. "Why doesn't anyone want me around? Even my family doesn't want me. What family? That's a good joke: my so called family. What's wrong with me?" He sat in an unfamiliar chair staring off into space feeling awful more than thinking about anything special. "I should have known better. I should have known it would turn out like that. It always does. I was stupid like usual." He felt the tears as he turned off the light and got into bed. "It's always going to be this way. No one will ever care. Why should they? I don't care either."

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, finish this Brief Treatment Plan. Put the signs you think are important in the left column. Write your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Helping your foster child with learning and school problems:

Learning is not simple. There are three important areas you need to think about. First, your foster child's abilities are where learning starts. Some children learn easier than others. However easily your foster child learns, he learns some things more easily than other things. Some assignments and subjects are easier and others are harder. Even if he is a very good learner, learning is hard work at times.

Next, his attitude is important. Does he want to learn? Is he willing to do what he needs to do to get the job done? It comes down to this. Does he think he is important enough to work at it? Is his future important enough to him to bother learning? Learning takes self-discipline and hard work. It also takes an attitude that says, "I am important enough to do what I have to do."

Third, your foster child needs learning skills. Some of these skills help him pay attention and study. Some help him listen and try to understand. Others help him cooperate. Still others help him follow the rules. He also learns about what adults expect and about the rights of others. If your foster child has problems learning, look at his abilities, attitudes, and behavior.

How do you think foster children fare with school and learning? Some do better than others. Still, they have more than their share of learning problems. Understanding this will help you as you think about your foster child. Here are some signs of learning and school problems. They will help you develop a learning plan for your foster child.

17. They often have trouble making choices and decisions.

How many choices and decisions does your foster child make in a day? When you stop to think about it, there are a lot. He decides whether to brush his teeth and what clothes to wear to school. His choices include when to talk or stay quiet. He decides who he will hang around with and who he will avoid. Does what his teacher is saying make any difference to him? Will he get even with whoever he thinks got into his stuff? Almost everything in his day requires decisions and choices.

Most signs of school and learning problems have choices and decisions as an ingredient. Give this some thought. Has he had a chance to learn what he needs to know? This does not have much to do with whether he can learn.

Homework is a good example. Greg is twelve and in the sixth grade. He is not doing his homework. Is he lazy? Is he being difficult? Is he not doing it because he does not know how? Is it because he does not have a good place to do it? These are important questions but are not the place to start.

Has Greg had a chance to learn to do his homework? Has he decided it is important? Can he choose a good place and time to do it? Has he learned how to start? Doing homework requires many choices and decisions. It is not common sense or something a child just knows. It is a mix of skills he has to learn before he has them.

Think about problems your foster child is having. Is she having trouble with homework? Does she have problems with other children? Is it a hassle to get her to brush her teeth? Does she have problems listening and paying attention?

What choices and decisions does she have to make? If she made better choices and decisions, would the problem go away? If so, this sign needs your attention.

Especially for foster children, making good choices and decisions may be very hard. Their lives have not taught them much about making decisions. It is not easy for them to learn, make mistakes, and learn from their mistakes.

The point is this. First help the child learn what to do and how to do it. It is not fair to insist he do it until he knows how. Children do what they know how to do. If there is a problem, they likely do not know how.

This is true for making good choices and decisions. If the child makes bad choices, he likely does not know how to make good ones. Start by teaching him how to decide. Help him understand why it is important.

Helping him understand why you think it is important is the key. Whether he buys-in or not, understanding how you decide is a start. Maybe he will agree and maybe not. Helping him change his priorities can be slow and frustrating for both of you.

18. They often cannot express their thoughts and ideas.

Many things can lead to trouble expressing thoughts and ideas. Children get excited or upset. They find themselves in new situations. They have to deal with things they do not understand.

Some children are more talkative and others are quieter. Some find it hard to write about things. Some can let you know what is on their minds from their facial expression and other body language. The ability to communicate varies a lot. For that matter, it varies for each child at times. Some days he can get his ideas across better than others.

Does your foster child have more trouble communicating than other children? There can be several reasons. Ask yourself these questions. Has he had a chance to learn? Did anyone care what he had to say? At least, you will give him a chance. You care what he has to say.

Your approach is to be patient, to teach, and to set a good example. Start by being a careful and interested listener. You ask, "How was your day?" He says, "Alright." you then say, "Alright is one of those words I have trouble reading. It sounds like your day was somewhere between good and bad. If you will tell me two or three things about your day, it will be easier to tell how it really was for you. Was there anything you liked or did not like about your day? What worked well or not so well? Will you share a little detail?"

Another reason for trouble communicating is a part of human nature. Children think and feel a lot more than they can communicate. It can be hard to find the right words or put thoughts and ideas together. The child might think he is not smart enough to explain things. Even worse, he might believe it is not worth the bother.

You say, "Knowing what you think and feel is important to me. It feels to me like you have some interesting thoughts and ideas. You either don't know how to say what's on your mind or do not think talking about it will make any difference. Maybe you think I will get upset or talking will make things worse. If you do not want to talk, I won't push. It would help me if I had some idea about what's keeping you from talking to me. Do you think talking might make things worse?" If he says it will or does not say anything, let it alone. That was the deal. You said you would not push.

Learning problems are connected. Trouble expressing thoughts and ideas can be connected to problems making choices and decisions. Think about it like this. The child has many thoughts and feelings. Which thoughts does he tell you about? Which feelings does he share? How does he choose? Deciding may be hard for him.

Also keep this in mind. If he thinks you will not believe him, he will keep his thoughts and feelings to himself. Saying what is on his mind might not be smart. It could go like this. "Did you do your homework?" "No." You then ask, "Why not?" He says, "It was too hard. I don't like school anyway." You now say, "It doesn't matter whether you like school or not. You have to do your homework."

The child has to wonder whether it might be smarter just to lie to you the next time. For what it is worth, he really did say the homework was too hard. This usually means he does not know how to do it. Not knowing how was a reasonable explanation. Also, it was the truth. He cannot do something he does not know how to do.

19. They cannot do many things others their age can do.

This is a complicated sign. The main question is why the child cannot do things when others the same age can. Ask yourself and the child whether he had a chance to learn. Was his chance as good as other children got? For example, just because he has been to school does not mean his chance was as good as theirs. Most children have parents who help and encourage them. Also, children do not all get equal treatment at school. Children who are clean, well-dressed, friendly, smart, and like school get a better shake than those who do not fit the mold. Foster children seldom fit the mold.

If your foster child cannot do things most children can do, several steps are in order. First, do not jump to conclusions. The explanation is more complicated than you may think.

Anna cannot play games as well as most children. Here are some possible reasons. She does not know how. She does not enjoy playing games. She does not like the other children. She is ill. She does not understand the rules. She has a physical problem that keeps her from doing as well as the other children. She is afraid.

Start to help by seeing if she will play with you. Now watch closely. You will get ideas and clues about what the problem is. Check them out.

Here is the key. Think about what it is she cannot do. Does she have problems understanding? How does she get along with the other children? Does she pay attention? How are her coordination, vision, and hearing? Do you notice something else that may cause her troubles?

Make a list of everything you notice. Make a note about any time or situation when a problem on your list is getting in her way.

For example, she was cleaning her room. You noticed she tried to put everything on one shelf. She did not use all the shelves. What could this have to do with trouble playing games?

You noticed she did better when playing with just one other child. Does she have a social problem? You also noticed she lost track of what was happening as she played. Does she have a problem understanding what is happening? You noticed she had trouble taking turns. She wanted to keep all the toys for herself. Does she have problems cooperating?

Now think about her putting all the stuff on one shelf. Why only use one shelf? Maybe it has something to do with organizing things. Maybe she has trouble figuring out how to use space. She may have trouble keeping track of things.

She has trouble organizing things. She does not understand and use space very well. Keeping track of things also is a problem. All these skills are used when playing. It now makes sense she might have problems playing games. It may not be a social problem at all. It may be a complicated learning problem that needs checked out.

20. They often do not understand assignments and what people expect.

The most likely reason for this is easy to miss. It is because the assignment or expectation was not clear. Maybe it was not explained in a way the child could easily understand. This is usually the trouble if the problem comes up mostly with one teacher or with another adult. If the problem often comes up with several people, something else is going on.

There are several possibilities. Put vision and hearing problems at the top of your list. Even if the teacher tells the child about the assignment, vision problems still need checked. Gestures, facial expressions, and other visual clues are important parts of listening and understanding. Even if the assignment was in writing, hearing is important. The teacher probably said something when giving the assignment. Other children may have made comments that could serve as clues. Any time a child has learning problems of any kind, have his hearing and vision tested. Note that whispering and talking quietly do not adequately test a child's hearing. It is the same idea as simply looking at objects or pictures does not adequately test his vision.

Maybe he did not understand because he was not paying attention. This could be because he did not think the assignment was interesting or important. Maybe he figured he would screw it up anyway. Children with low self-esteem often think there is little point in trying.

Two other possibilities need some thought. He might have special problems paying attention. For example, he might have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). This condition was

discussed before. Be sure the child is seen by a psychologist to check this out. The child will be tested for other problems at the same time.

The other possibility is harder to check. The assignment or what the teacher expects may be beyond the child's learning and experience. He has not learned what he needs to know to understand the assignment. This may be because his education was neglected. He may have serious mental or emotional problems. He just may not have the needed ability.

Not understanding is complicated. Keep an open mind. You need to check out all the possibilities. Keep encouraging and supporting him while you check them out. The key is not to do anything he may read as blaming him. It is not his fault he does not understand. There is more to it than his being difficult and not cooperating.

21. They often do not understand what they read.

This sign is an example of the last sign. The child does not understand when most children his age do. Not understanding what he reads is a serious problem. It can have several causes.

Vision problems go at the top of the list. For children in school, undiscovered vision problems are not very likely. Illness, difficulty concentrating and paying attention, not liking what is available to read, and finding the effort required a bit much also are possibilities. Here is the key idea. Not understanding what he reads has little to nothing to do with not trying, being lazy, or a bad attitude. These kinds of things could cause the child not to read; but they would have nothing to do with understanding or not understanding. When this sign is present, the child goes through the motions of reading. It just does not lead to understanding.

If you give a child a page to read and he looks at all the words, he has gone through the motions of reading. You then ask a question or two and discover he does not understand. What is happening? Here is what to think about. Your first idea may be that he is not smart enough to understand. Maybe he does not know some of the new words. He may not know anything about the ideas or subject area. Any of these problems could cause him to have trouble understanding. They should be checked out. But the problem usually has little to do with these kinds of things. It is more likely he has not learned how to read.

For school-age children, try this. Get a comic book and have him read it to himself and then have him read a page or so aloud. Ask a couple of questions or get him to tell you what happened in the story. Ask for a detail or two he could not get just from the pictures. If he can give you the details, he can both read and understand. The question only is what his reading grade level is. A psychologist or counselor at school can help with this. The goal then is to help him raise his reading level.

If he is at least nine or ten-years-old and has trouble reading the comic book or cannot tell you what happened, he likely has a reading disability. It is possible he has never gotten reading instruction, has never been to school, and always lived with adults who cannot read. If this were true, you would know and could take it into consideration. A reading disability is much more likely.

What is a reading disability? There are several kinds. They sometimes involve perception: the child sees what is on the page but has trouble making any sense of the marks and squiggles. The child may see things backward or upside down. He may be unable to track the line of print across the page. He may have problems keeping oriented on the page. A reading specialist can help define the problem(s) and suggest ways to help him.

Keep this point in mind. Children who can learn usually do learn. Youngsters who can read and understand usually do. If the child has a problem, just trying harder is very unlikely to do any good.

22. They often get confused.

You will notice this sign in your foster child in a couple of ways. First, the child has trouble getting the story straight when talking about things that happened. He might leave out important details or get things out of order. He might not have the time element right or misread the motives or behavior of people. He is confused about what happened.

The problem can come up in a different way. The child gets into trouble. He is surprised and does not understand. He may become angry, very upset, and then get into more trouble. It is like a confusing snowball. When it gets as big as it is going to get, the child has no idea what happened. He just figures he is in trouble again for who knows why. It is for sure he does not know.

This sign can cause the child to get confused and can cause him to have behavior problems. He also may have major school problems because he gets as confused about what happens in class as he does almost everywhere he goes. Many children who have trouble getting along have this problem.

This kind of difficulty is hard to diagnose and understand. The child may have more problems in some situations than in others. It is hard to predict. It can spill over into what he reads. He may get as confused about events in a book as in the real world.

Your first step is to see the problem when it is there. There are many other explanations that are quicker and easier. It is easier to chock the problem up to not paying attention, lying, not trying, and on and on. Youngsters do get confused; and for some, it is a serious learning problem.

An example may help. Jerry is fifteen and is suspended from school. The latest mess went like this. He had been doing well for almost three months. This was a long time for Jerry. It started one Thursday when he got into it with a teacher. "She just cracked on me and gave me a detention." He was asked why she did this. "I don't know. She doesn't like kids. She likes all the power." What happened? "I wasn't doing anything. She just comes up and tells me I have to move." Why did she want him to move? "Who knows? She just likes jerking kids around."

A few minutes later, he went on. "I don't have to take it from her and told her so." What happened then? "I'm suspended aren't I? What does it look like what happened?" No, he is not covering up; he really does not understand what happened.

23. Trying harder does not lead to their work and skills getting better.

This is very common for children with learning problems. If it goes unnoticed, and it often does, they finally get to where they just quit trying. This is most common for young people in high school. Children in the elementary grades often have the problem too. Blaming the child for not doing better is not uncommon. By the time he gives up, adults see him as lazy, having a bad attitude, and not trying.

Think about this. Suppose you had tried for years to learn how to do something and could not learn to do it. Add to this people who keep saying, "You are not trying hard enough." "You just need to put forth more effort." "You are failing, and some day you will wish you had taken advantage of the opportunity." How long would you keep trying? What would your attitude be? How would you react to those people? Maybe you are a saint; but most of us would probably do and say things we should not put in the book. It may be the youngsters who dig in and fight back are the healthy ones. The ones who passively keep trying may have another kind of problem. Whatever you think you would do, trying harder and still not succeeding is a big problem.

What is wrong? Why is the youngster not learning, not succeeding? For his sake, the answer needs to be found before he joins the ranks of those who just quit.

This is something worth thinking about. With some exceptions, children who do not do well in school are trying as hard as those who are doing well, those for whom school comes easier. It does not take as long to do homework if you know how to do it. It does not take as much effort to read assignments if you are a good reader. "It is not fair. I spent two hours to get a D and others spent less than an hour to get B's. I quit!" Can you think of other examples? The point is that any time your foster child is not learning, help him find out why. It likely has little to do with anything that will improve just by trying harder.

24. They do some assignments very well and others very badly.

This sign can be hard to spot since it goes against the way most people think about learning and achievement. Any child might have a bad day, get a bad grade, or just not do very well. This sign gets at something a little different.

Here is the point. Youngsters' performance and achievement are fairly consistent over time and across the board. If a child gets A's and B's in some subjects, it is unusual for him to get D's and F's in other subjects. Here, we are talking about basic subjects such as Science, English, History, Math, Social Studies, and the like. Subjects such as Music, Physical Education, and Shop sometimes do not show the same pattern, although they usually do. Getting D's and F's usually does not go with getting A's. If the pattern for the child is not consistent, there is often a problem needing attention.

For example, Renee was in the seventh grade and was a good student. She always had trouble with Math; but this year, she started failing Math. Her other grades were fine. She was told she was not paying attention and was not trying hard enough. Also, Math was just harder for girls or so the argument went. As you see, the message was to tell her it was her fault.

Her foster parents did not accept these explanations and looked for other reasons. As it turned out, there were three problems. First, she was now in Junior High and was a little overwhelmed. The work included some beginning Algebra and she was afraid to ask her teacher for extra help. Next, she had a habit of being a little sloppy and was not keeping numbers and other symbols aligned on her paper. This was causing her to become confused. Finally, she believed boys were better at Math than girls and thought she was just not a good Math student. The result was failure. With a little extra help and some additional attention to neatness, her Math grades went up to C's which was a big improvement.

There may be many reasons for this problem. Some subjects emphasize reading more while others emphasize thinking and discussion. Some are more visual and others are more mental. Some add to knowledge and skills the child already has while others add new ideas and require new skills. When you see a big difference in how your foster child does from one subject to another, work with the child to figure out why. The real problem is likely not his fault.

This sign also comes up with activities away from school. How well youngsters do most day-to-day things is usually consistent from activity to activity. Do not count exceptional talents such as music and playing ball. Be concerned if the child usually does average or above in most things and has a few things he does badly. What do the activities where he has trouble have in common? The child's trouble likely has something to do with one or more of the common elements. It might be eye-hand coordination, working in groups, getting organized, or something else.

If you watch closely and give some thought to it, the problem can usually be spotted. This gives you a chance to give the child some extra help. It also gives you a chance to point him toward

activities where the problem does not get in the way so much. You want him to spend most of his time doing what he does well. He needs success as much as he needs to improve his skills.

25. They often forget what to do or what people expect.

Real memory problems are uncommon. Forgetting or not remembering to remember is very common. If it only happens once in a while and seldom involves important things, it is no big deal. It is a problem if forgetting is a regular reason for not doing things. It does get to a point when "I forgot," is not just one of those things.

It is tempting to accuse the child of lying or not paying attention. Either may be true. If so, they are themselves problems needing your attention. More likely are several other explanations.

First, the child did not see the assignment or expectation as important enough to remember. He thought it did not matter that much. Dealing with this is not complicated. It also is a good place to start when you first notice the sign. Talk with your foster child about how important you think the assignment or expectation is. Stress with him how important you think it is for him to treat it as important. This often helps a lot all by itself. Also be sure you are not using "I forgot," with him or others in the family over things they thought you were going to do. Remembering is a part of caring, respecting each other, and living in a family.

For example, "In our family, we remember to do our work. It is important. Your work is going to school and doing your school work. We expect you to do your work too."

The next step is to be sure she understands what you expect. When you ask her to do something, have her repeat your request and briefly tell you how she will go about doing whatever it was. Take five minutes for her to explain her homework assignments and describe how she will do them. She might tell you, "I will start on page 144 and read to the end of page 147. Also I will work the nine problems on page 201." The point is to be sure she knows what to do before you expect her to remember.

The next step if the first ones do not work is to set some clear consequences for not remembering. You might say, "You forget to do your home work a lot. I also know you often forget to clean your room. You say they are important but you do not act like they are. I want to make them a little more important. Here is how I am going to do it. We will work on organizing and scheduling things. You and I are then going to figure out what will happen each time you forget to do your homework or clean your room. There need to be consequences. What should they be? If we cannot decide together, I will decide for us. What do you think?" Positive consequences for remembering are a good idea if you can come up with them. If you use a negative consequence, be careful. It needs to be mild. The point is to help the child remember and not to punish her for forgetting. It also needs to be something you can do daily if necessary and something you will remember. Your forgetting would itself be a problem.

For example, saying she cannot be on the ball team is not good since it is too big. Also, it would punish her more than simply remind her. Here is the key. Keeping her off the ball team is not something you can do or not do depending on whether she remembers. She cannot be on the team only on the days she remembers. Once you have taken her off the team, you have played your only card. You need a little card to play each time she forgets. Along with this, you want her to start remembering and not just give up. That is why you need a little card you can play over and over as needed.

You can help the child develop memory skills. Doing something the same time every day makes it easier to remember. Always doing activities in the same order helps. Making lists will help if there is a way to remember to check the list. For example, put her homework list where she studies. Having a set number of actions to remember makes it easier. For example, "When you get home from school, you have four things to do before you have free time. Let the dog out. Change clothes. Have a snack. Do your homework."

If your foster child's memory problems do not improve, a psychological examination is necessary. Also, if a child who has not had memory problems starts having them, he needs to be seen by his doctor.

The rest of the signs in this section usually accompany one or more of the ones already discussed. It is important to think about the earlier signs and the suggestions as you consider those that follow.

26. They often do not follow instructions and directions.

This sign usually is because the child did not understand the direction or just forgot. It likely does not have much to do with defiance or intentionally not cooperating.

Be sure the child heard the instruction or has read the direction. Have him repeat it to you and tell you how he will follow it. This lets you know he got the instruction and understood it. Here is the key. You say, "Change your clothes after school." When he tells you how he will do it, some detail is important. When he gets home, what are the steps? He goes to his room. He takes off his school clothes. He gets out his after-school clothes and puts his school clothes where they belong. He then gets dressed and goes onto his next activity. Almost any instruction can be put into a series of steps to follow. Also, most of the earlier discussion on forgetting works here too.

27. They do not pay attention to time and do not manage time very well.

This is a complicated sign. It has as much to do with the example you set for your foster child as anything. Your setting a good example will help as will letting him know you think time is important. Whatever you do, it may be tough. His attitude about time and ability to manage time may be fairly set before he comes to live with you.

Here is what you can do. Are you usually on time? Do things happen at regular times such as dinner time? Do you usually get everything done you planned for the day? When you tell him it will be a few minutes, does it really happen in a few minutes? Be sure you are setting a good example.

Here are a couple more points. Doing school work has a lot to do with time management. He needs to get to school on time and get to class on time after he gets to school. He needs to do school work in the time he is given to do it and then turn it in on time. He needs to figure out how long work will take and pace himself so he gets it done.

His problems usually are because of several things. Not seeing how long things will take is the most common. Getting better at this requires thinking about it, making estimates and seeing how they work out, and remembering how long it took the last time. Another common problem is not keeping at it. Putting off starting, getting distracted, day-dreaming, quitting before finishing, and other bad habits get in the way.

This sign may be part of a more general learning problem; but it usually is not. It usually has mostly to do with bad work habits and not staying with it.

Children who have trouble with time often spend more time fussing and getting ready to do something than it takes to do it. It helps if they learn to just start without worrying about getting ready, being sure they have all their materials, and so forth. Next, teach them to take breaks sparingly. Taking too many breaks is more often a problem than not taking enough. Also teach them to go on to something else if they get stuck. He should make a note to come back to it but go on for now. He just needs to be sure not to forget to come back to it. For example, if he gets stuck on his Science, do the History assignment and come back to Science. Even if he still gets stuck, at least he has his History finished.

Another common reason is not knowing where to start. Teach him to start somewhere. If it turns out to be the wrong place, he can start again or at least know where to start the next time.

28. They get bad grades.

A bad grade once in a while is no big deal. Even the reason for it is not very important if it only happens once in a while. Here is the important point. This applies to things like a single day's homework, a specific test, or individual assignments in class. It does not apply to grade cards or to whole subjects. They represent many grades over time. If your foster child gets a D or F on his grade card or always gets bad grades in a specific subject, he has a problem.

Also think about this. What is a bad grade? It is not unusual to hear someone say, "He could get A's if he wanted to." Here is the fact. Youngsters who can get A's by making a reasonable effort get A's. It is as simple as that. If he does not get A's, either he really cannot or it would take a super-human effort. Some extra effort is good. If it goes too far, the good grade comes at the expense of other activities and at a very high cost in stress and pressure. The A is not worth it. Perfection can be given far too much importance.

Keep this in mind. C's are average in most schools. Average children get mostly C's. If he is getting mostly C's or a C among the B's, let him know you think he is doing fine. A little pep-talk to get him to hang in there and give it his best is okay. Any more pressure than this is a bad idea. It can actually make things worse.

Bad grades are D's and F's. If the child is getting bad grades in one or two subjects or in most subjects, there is a serious problem. First, suspect a reading problem. There usually is one. Next, consider the full range of possible learning problems. Keep looking until an answer is found. When you see this sign, it is unlikely it is the youngster's fault or that he can do anything about it by himself. If someone tells you he just needs to try harder, find someone else who really can help you and the child figure out what's wrong.

29. They do not ask for help or let others help.

This sign may be more likely seen with foster children than with most youngsters. Why? Their life-experiences may have taught them asking for help is a bad idea. They may not have gotten any help. If they did, maybe it was not helpful or it may have been unpleasant for them. "You should already know." "You would have known this if you had listened and paid attention." "I am tired of your bothering me." Also, the youngster may see asking for help as a sign of weakness or failure. This is not unusual for children whose self-esteem is low.

Too much help also can be a problem. "Will you show me how to work this problem?" "This is a good time to get into the ideas and concepts associated with Math. Let's start back a few pages to see if you have everything up to this point." When adults try to help, especially with school work, they often try to give more help and take much more time than the child had in mind. He may want some help but may not want to spend an hour and sit through a lecture to get it.

For some children, the problem is not knowing how and when to ask for help. If they ask, they don't know how to accept and use the help they get.

Here are some tips that often work. Let him know you are interested. Ask what he is studying, what they did in school today, what he thinks about what he learned in Social Studies. You are interested in him and in what he is studying. Ask him to tell you about what he reads. Get him to show you how to work a Math problem or what the point of an experiment is. Get used to talking about his school work. If he is having a problem, say, "You are having trouble with that. If you want, I will help you with it some time." Do not offer to help right then. If he has not asked in a day or two, ask, "Did you figure out how to do the assignment we were talking about?" If he says he has, ask a question or two to be sure. If not, ask what his plan is to learn what he needs to learn.

Also keep this in mind. Only give as much help as he wants and can accept. If he misspells a word and asks for help, tell him how to spell it. Dictionary lessons can come later. He asks how to work a Math problem. Simply work the problem while he watches. Start by giving him the help he wants in the way he wants it. As time goes on, it will get easier. Later, you may first check to see if he wants to look up the word or have you explain how to work the problem.

Another group of youngsters have trouble with this sign. They are the ones who are too into being perfect or are unusually strong-willed. As you work with these children, the problem usually is their negative or angry reactions. Push just a little but a fight is not good. Say, "Your reaction to my trying to help is a problem. I am going to try to help anyway. If you want to react so badly, go for it. Learning to accept a little help is about as important for you as what you need help with." Just remember your success will come through trying to help and then trying again. Helping your foster child is a slow process and not a reason to go to war.

30. They have trouble accepting or dealing with criticism.

Children who are hyperactive or suffer from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) have a lot of trouble handling criticism. They tend to be emotionally high-strung and overreact to things. They also are more likely to receive criticism and negative feedback from adults. All this adds to their frustration and stress to make it harder for them to handle criticism. They may experience criticism much like everyone else. They just do not hide their feelings as well.

Children who need to be too perfect also have trouble with criticism. For them, even a small comment or suggestion may be hard to handle. They see it as an attack on them personally. If their work is not perfect, they see it as totally wrong. You might see one of these children destroy all the work he has done on a project if someone finds fault or suggests a way of improving it. It is perfect or it is junk. This would be the extreme; but degrees of the problem are not uncommon.

Foster children often have special problems with criticism. It may remind them of when they were abused or other bad things that happened to them. The child may think your criticism will be followed by violence or something else bad. For him, criticism may be something to fear.

Here is the point. If a child can handle criticism, he can manage almost any problem, including most learning problems. He accepts and follows tips and suggestions. If he cannot, helping him is tough no matter what his problem is.

Talk with him about the problem. Try to see how criticism feels to him. See what he thinks and feels when someone criticizes. Until you and he get past the problem, it will be hard to help, hard to deal with anything.

This is the bind. Talking with him about the problem is itself criticism. You are criticizing how he handles criticism. This might work. "You have me in a real bind. I have experience and know some good stuff. I learned most of it by doing things wrong and making mistakes. Here is my problem. Sometimes I see you learning the way I did. I see you are doing something wrong or in a way that doesn't work very well. I think it would be easier for you if I told you what I'd learned; but when I do, you get upset or bent out of shape. That makes me feel like 'Why bother?' Should I say something or just let you learn the hard way?"

31. They always have excuses for not doing well.

This point is easy to miss. When children always have excuses for not doing well, the excuses are usually exactly what are causing the problem. They are usually right. They say they did not know what to do or did not understand. They say they forgot to do their work or say they thought they had done it right. They say they did not hear, and on and on. After a while, their excuses wear thin. It is easy for adults to get frustrated and just react. A better reaction is to take the youngster at his word. It is probably the truth.

Listen to his excuse. Say, "I believe you. What you told me is exactly what happened. I also want you to learn the difference between an excuse and a reason. A reason is an explanation. An excuse makes it sound like it was okay. Your not doing well is not okay. Now that we understand the reason, we are going to figure out a way to keep it from happening. Now, you say you did not do well because you did not hear the assignment. Let's talk about how to be sure you hear and understand assignments." Just be sure you stay calm and focused on the reason. It is a problem to solve and not an excuse for you to blame the child.

32. They usually think not doing well is someone else's fault.

This is an example of the last sign. Thinking it was someone else's fault is an excuse. After talking about the difference between excuses and reasons, you might say, "You think the reason you did not do well is your teacher's fault. Tell me how it is her fault. That is a good problem for you and me to solve."

In another situation, you say, "Let me see if I understand. Your friend Joe mouthed-off to you in the hall between English and Social Studies. This got you in a bad mood. Also, some kid was in your seat when you went into the room. This got you even more upset. You were telling him to get out of your seat when Mr. Miller came in. He got on your back; and that was too much. You said some things and he said some things and you ended up in the office. It went down hill from there and you are now on suspension. Do I have it right?" The youngster says, "You have that right. It was Joe's fault." You then say, "Whose fault it was does not make much difference right now. The people at school think it was your fault. It doesn't really matter. Here is the problem. Whosever fault it was, you are the one with the problem. Let's think about the reasons why you now have a problem and figure out how you can manage and control things differently next time so you do not end up the goat. Of everything that happened, is there one thing that may not have been your best choice? Is there somewhere in there where you had a better choice if you had thought of it at the time?"

33. They have to have an adult standing over them to be sure their work gets done.

This can be a sign of several problems. The most likely is that the child has gotten used to only doing his work if an adult is standing over him. Someone has taught him a very bad habit. Self-discipline, self-direction, responsibility, and the ability to work independently are learned. Your task is to teach him skills and habits he should already have but does not.

Another possibility is a need for structure, support, and help. The adult standing over the child is likely to offer suggestions, help keep him on task, and help him organize his work. It seems like the child needs constant supervision but the real need is for help.

Another reason is a little different. Because of hyperactivity, attention deficits, or other learning problems, the youngster just cannot settle down and do the work. If these causes were there, he would have other problems you would notice.

Whatever the cause, the child's need for adult supervision is real. If you watch, here is what you will notice. He can work alone for short periods. Maybe he can work alone only for ten minutes. Maybe he can only handle three minutes to begin with. Keep shortening the time until you find an amount of time he can work without you watching him. It will take a lot of patience but is

nothing to get upset about or frustrated over. If you do, quit for a few minutes. Say, "I need a break. How about you?"

If you want to teach the child to work independently, positive rewards work best. Start with an amount of time short enough to be sure he succeeds easily. If there are not other serious problems, ten minutes usually works to start.

Say, "If you stay with it for ten minutes right now, you can quit whenever you want after that." The positive reward is getting to quit whenever he wants. You worry he will not get his work done. He probably will not. It likely will be some time before he finishes an assignment. Learning to do it himself is the first order of business, unless you want to stand over him for the next ten or twenty years. Increase the time slowly. Five minutes a week usually works; but go back to a level where he can succeed if he fails three or four days in a row. Have one hour of working by himself as your goal. Do not take it past one hour. By then, he is on his way to accepting the responsibility himself.

34. They feel teachers have it in for them.

First, consider that it may be true. At least, the child believes it is true. That is a good place to start. Do not start by telling her it is not true. She will only see you are unwilling to see her side of things. You are just like those teachers who are against her.

Also, children who are doing well in school almost never have this complaint. Even if they sometimes do, it does not keep them from doing their work. It may be human nature to feel a little put upon at times, especially when the child has been criticized or did not get something she wanted.

Think about this. An adult gets reprimanded at work or does not get a job he thought he deserved. Do you think you would hear him say this? "The people at work are always reasonable and fair. I had the reprimand coming. I appreciate their honesty with me. I am a better person for it." Children usually handle these kinds of things better than adults but even they have their limits.

This may help. Say, "Okay, the teachers have it in for you. You have told me they are not doing anything specific; but you can tell. Maybe they just don't like kids or at least some kids. They have their favorites and you are not one. You are not going to play up to them. Have I got it right so far?" You then continue, "They have it in for you; and it keeps you from doing well, from getting the education you tell me you want. Here is the part I do not understand. As angry as you are, it surprises me you are going to let them win, let them stop you from getting an education. It looks like you would fight back. Do you know how to fight back, how to win?" Listen to see if his ideas would help or make things worse. Likely he will have no idea. You then say, "I have some ideas but I think you would rather be angry and lose. I wonder if you have what it takes to

win. What do you think?" If he chooses to quit, it was worth a try. His problem goes far beyond feeling picked on. A psychological evaluation and counseling are needed.

35. They often disrupt the class or the activities of others.

Adults usually see this as a discipline problem and sometimes it is. It is usually a sign of learning problems. Think about the child's behavior. Now ask yourself this question. Have you ever seen a child who is doing well in school act like this on any regular basis?

Here is the typical argument. If he would just settle down and behave, he would do better in school. Here is the more important point. If he did better in school, he would behave better. Almost always, the learning problem came first and the behavior problem last.

Why does he misbehave? He may have a behavior disorder that needs special treatment. This is so likely, it always needs checked out. Even if he does not have a behavior disorder, it is nearly certain he has a serious learning problem.

Listen patiently to the people at school as they tell you about his behavior. Make the point with him that he should behave better. Giving him little rewards for good days may help. Still, find out what his learning problem is. Thinking about the signs and suggestions in this workbook is a place to start. Also, a psychological evaluation and an assessment by a learning disabilities specialist are important. Doing any more about the behavior problems before the evaluations are done is not a good idea. Just getting on him and pushing him to do better can cause the child more problems than he already has. This is a good rule-of-thumb. Until you understand his problems, do not try to fix them.

36. They do not make any effort to cooperate and get along.

This sign is close to the end of the school and learning line for the child. He has quit. Children usually do not reach this point until high school but it can happen to younger children. They get failing grades, are punished, and often are suspended and then expelled. Along the way, they are likely to pass through juvenile court and often end up in foster homes, group homes, or institutions.

Here is the point to understand. This sign is an outcome and not the original problem. How did it start? Usually it started as a learning problem the child should have gotten help with.

Is there no hope? There is if everyone working with the child understands two things. First, the underlying trouble is a long standing and serious learning problem. It needs treated. Next,

understand that the child's cooperating and trying to get along makes little difference for him. When he was younger, he likely tried. By now, not bothering to try makes sense. How hard do you think you would try if you failed almost every day of your life?

Helping starts with being honest with the child. Say, "I think you have a learning problem. I want to try to help. Let me be up-front with you about this. If I were you, I would probably laugh at anyone who says she wants to help. You have heard that story before. Also, I don't think I would be much interested in trying if I had your experiences with school and learning. I cannot give you any guarantee. I am just offering to try. Can we talk about it?"

37. They skip school a lot.

Let's assume this is not because of a medical or physical problem and is not due to a severe emotional or mental illness. Often missing school is the step beyond not caring. The young person only goes to school when someone makes him go. He might go if he has nothing better to do. He thinks almost anything is better. Skipping school finally leads to dropping out or getting expelled.

By now, you see how it works. Learning problems keep the child from being successful at school. He tries but does not succeed. Over time, learning problems turn into behavior and attitude problems. These lead to severe stress and very low self-esteem. These problems lead to not caring and often to dropping out.

Here is the sad truth. At each step along the way, it was easier to blame the child and hold him responsible than to understand and help. At least, this will not happen to him at your home.

Your Learning Plan for your foster child:

Develop a learning plan for your foster child. What signs of learning problems have you noticed? Write the signs below. Next, what might be causing the problems? There is usually more than one possible cause. List the possible causes. Finally, for each sign you have noticed, what is your plan to better understand the cause? How will you work with the youngster? What will you say and do?

1. Sign, possible causes, and your action plan:

2. Sign, possible causes, and your action plan:

3. Sign, possible causes, and your action plan:

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH YOUR FOSTER CHILD - TWO

First things first:

This is the second workbook. Here you learn about abused and neglected children and their special problems. The workbook starts with a quick check to see how your parenting relationship is going with your foster child. You then learn how to help foster children get along better with other people and how to help them with their behavior problems. After that, you learn about helping foster children who are suicidal and those who are mentally ill.

A quick parenting check:

How are you and your foster child getting along with each other? Think about this. It gets at the fit between you and the child.

The children placed with you have their own personalities, different backgrounds, and sometimes have very serious problems. The fit between you and them might not come quickly or easily. It helps to check the fit to see if it is working for you and the child.

Here is a quick check to see how the fit is between you and your foster child. Think about each question in this way. Is the answer almost always yes, usually yes, sometimes yes, seldom yes, or almost never yes?

As a rough guide, put a 5 to the left of a question if your answer is almost always yes. Put 4 for usually, 3 for sometimes, 2 for seldom, and 1 for almost never.

1. ___ Are you responsible and fair when disciplining your foster child?
2. ___ Do you know what your foster child needs and what is important to him/her?
3. ___ Can you get your foster child to cooperate with you without you getting frustrated or upset?
4. ___ Do you spend time every day talking or playing with your foster child?
5. ___ Does your foster child like to spend time with you?
6. ___ Are you usually pleased with and proud of your foster child?

7. ____ Do you know about and are you interested in your foster child's activities?
8. ____ Do you know about and are you helping with your foster child's problems?
9. ____ Do you set a good example for your foster child?
10. ____ Do you give your foster child space to grow and learn on his/her own?
11. ____ Are you interested in what your foster child thinks and feels about things?
12. ____ Do you do all you can to support your foster child's interests, activities, and goals?

Helping your foster child get along with other people:

Your foster child's fit with you is not the only relationship she has that needs your help. She has relationships with other people in your family and with children and adults at school. She needs to get along with people in your neighborhood and in your community. Being able to get along with people may have more to do with her future success than anything else.

Here is the key. Because of abuse, neglect, or other bad life-experiences, foster children often have problems getting along with people. Maybe this comes up every day and maybe only once in a while. However often your foster child has problems, she needs your help.

Here are some signs of foster children having trouble getting along. Your concern and help with these problems are a start to a better life for them.

1. They pout and are hard to live with.

All children have some way of handling it when they don't get their way. They have their own ways of reacting when things do not work out as they want. They have ways of dealing with a world they think is sometimes unfair.

Two of their choices are temper tantrums and pouting. Most children use one or the other of these once in a while. If you watch your foster child for a while, you likely will see that she uses one more than the other.

Just to be fair, answer this question. When you get angry or frustrated, are you more likely to pout or have a little temper tantrum? Now, if you had lived your foster child's life, would you feel angry and frustrated? If so, would you be more likely to pout about it or have a temper tantrum once in a while?

Take a minute to think about a foster child who neither pouts nor has temper tantrums. This can be much worse than either pouting or temper tantrums. Why? Because it often means the child is just accepting whatever happens. Even worse, she has gotten to where she no longer has any feelings about what happens to her. She does not care or thinks what she feels does not matter. This is a very bad sign.

What is your foster child doing when she pouts? She is angry, frustrated, or upset about something. She mainly feels angry. She does not talk about it or try to work out her problem. Instead, she pouts and makes it rough for other people.

What can you do? Think about what upset her. Maybe what happened was unfair or she really was treated badly. Either way, pouting about it is a problem.

Say, "I have thought about what happened. We can talk about it if you want to. Here is my problem right now. You have a right to feel how you feel but pouting about it is not your best choice. I think it would be better if you either got up and over it or at least talked about it. It is your choice. Here is what I am going to do. I am going to do nothing unless you choose to talk with me about it. You can pout or talk. It's your choice. If you choose to pout, please do it in your room." Now leave it alone. Her only choice is to behave more appropriately or be by herself.

2. They are hateful and in a bad mood.

Everyone gets in a bad mood sometimes. Even so, it is not okay to take it out on everyone around. Instead, it is a good time to get better at managing thoughts, feelings, and relationships.

Managing feelings and relationships takes skills children mostly learn by example. Your foster child likely had bad examples set for him. Also, he can bottle-up his anger about what happened to him. It then can easily come spilling out. It may not take much to set him off.

The point is this. Your foster child may have more than a little reason to be in a bad mood and hateful. He needs extra tolerance and patience. More than the usual amount of sensitivity and understanding from you are in order for him.

Here is something that usually helps. Leave his bad mood alone at first. Offer to talk with him about his bad feelings. But don't make a big deal out of cheering him up. He will be happier when he is happier.

Deal only with his hatefulness. It usually comes off as cutting remarks, putting people down, and being angry. Help him manage these strong feelings better.

Don't react to his hatefulness by being hateful and angry with him. Try to stay calm and do not take his hatefulness personally. It has little to do with you. It is coming from his past.

Talk with him about what is really going on. Say, "Here is the real problem. When you say and do things that are so hateful, it really hurts. You have been hurt a lot. I know that and so do you. Hurting me and other people is not your best choice, though. I am going to try very hard not to hurt you even if you feel you need to hurt me. Maybe one of these days, you will not need to take your hurt out on others. Until then, please think about it. Here is an idea. If you can tell me about what is bothering you, maybe we can figure out something to help."

This is the point. The temptation is to get mad or to try to force him to behave better. This will not work. It will only make matters worse. You need to set a good example for him. Tell him his behavior is not okay with you. Teach him better ways to handle his angry feelings and let him know when you notice that he is doing better. Over time, his moods, attitudes, and behavior will change.

3. They get very angry when things do not go their way.

This is the temper tantrum side of anger and frustration. Children get frustrated and upset when things do not go their way. As with most problems, it is a matter of how much. The problem is not so much the child's reaction itself as it is how angry she gets.

Here is what you need to do. Help your foster child feel okay about being angry or frustrated. At the same time, she needs to manage her anger better.

Her life-experiences taught her to react the way she does. They taught her to have temper tantrums. She likely learned the behavior from an expert temper tantrum thrower. Also, maybe the tantrums she saw were taken out on her. She now sees the behavior as appropriate and as her only choice. She behaves the way she was taught to behave.

This is your goal. Teach her better ways to manage her anger and frustration. Don't get angry with her. Don't threaten her. You want to set an example of better behavior.

With younger foster children, it is true that ignoring temper tantrums often works. They then come up with more appropriate ways to let you know how they feel. By ten to fifteen-years-old, they have already learned how to let you know when they are mad, and they have learned the wrong behavior. Ignoring them is no longer your best choice.

Whenever you can, do not deal with the temper tantrum while it is happening. Doing anything then only makes matters worse. Here is what you need to know. Tantrums take a lot of energy and can only last about so long. The child cannot keep it up forever. Wait calmly until his anger lessens, and it will. Now say, "You have used a tantrum to say something to me. I do (or do not)

understand what you were trying to say. Here is my point. I don't do anything about things when told about them in such an angry way. Let's try again. If you want to say something to me and want me to do something about it, tell me more calmly. Help me understand what has you so upset. What do you want to tell me and what do you want me to do about it?"

4. They scream and yell at people.

Over a week or so, make a note every time anyone in your home screams or yells at someone. It will be easier to help your foster child if you see she isn't the only one who is behaving inappropriately. What if no one at your house ever yells? If you have a quiet family, then count the times anyone raises his voice or talks harshly to someone. This is your brand of screaming and yelling.

You will see the child's behavior is inappropriate only by degrees. She yells and screams too loudly, too much, too long, and at the wrong times. She over does it. That is what her problem really is. To help her, use the tips for dealing with temper tantrums.

Also, be sure no one yells and screams back at her when she does her yelling thing. Each person in your family needs to take responsibility for how he or she handles the child's behavior. At a family meeting, you can set the rules. Say, "Rosie has a problem with screaming and yelling. We all are going to help her learn better ways to say what she has to say. Let's agree to do this. Any time Rosie yells at one of us, he or she will wait patiently until the yelling stops. Say this to her. 'If you have finished yelling, I would like to hear what you want to say to me. Will you tell me in a more appropriate way?'" Just be sure you are ready to be a good camper when your four-year-old reminds you by saying, "No yelling. I only listen when you talk right."

5. They break or damage things.

This sign depends on whether breaking and damaging things is accidental, unintentional, or on purpose. These are three different problems. If the youngster often breaks things by accident, it is probably a physical problem. It may involve coordination, vision, or another medical problem. It needs checked out. Unintentionally breaking things is a little harder to understand. It may be because of not knowing how to use toys and equipment. Think about why it happens and see if teaching the child how to use them might work better than forbidding her to use whatever she broke.

Unintentionally breaking or intentionally breaking things are sometimes degrees of the same problem. It works like this. The child feels upset, angry, or wants to get even. Either she is careless or too rough with others' things or just breaks them. She may act the same way with her

things. Here is what is happening. She is taking out her anger and frustration on things. The behavior is a kind of temper tantrum.

It is usually better calmly to watch while she breaks whatever it is. Most of the time, you cannot stop her anyway. She can always break them when you are not there to do anything about it. Yes, it can get frustrating and expensive. This way of handling the behavior is called the therapeutic approach and is the best way. It is never a good idea to manhandle her or to try to physically force her to cooperate.

There are several things you can do. If she can, she should pay for what she broke. Don't take all her money for very long. Set up payments she can afford.

Usually, it helps not to replace what she broke if it belonged to her. Be careful. You don't want her to end up with nothing but junk. She needs to see her things as valuable before not breaking them will matter to her.

Each time she breaks something, talk with her about how she felt. Get her to talk about how she felt angry, jealous, or frustrated. Say, "Your breaking things is a problem. At least you reached your goal. If you broke them to cause someone a problem, you got the job done. That lets me know you can communicate. Here is what I want to talk about. There are better ways to let people know how you feel. For example, yelling or pounding your pillow would be better. They are not long-term solutions but are in the right direction. Can we talk about some choices you have that are better than breaking things?" Having this discussion as often as necessary is important. Try to have it when neither you nor the child is upset or angry.

6. They hit or hurt people.

Children who have been abused learned this behavior from people who took it to the extreme. Parents who think it is alright to spank and slap their children teach the same lesson in a milder form. They teach hitting and hurting are okay if you do not hit too hard or hurt too much. It is the same lesson for the child, though. Be sure you are not teaching this to any child. It is exactly what you do not want her to learn.

Stop the child from hitting and hurting. Ask her to stop. Insist she stops. If necessary, restrain her from the behavior. If your foster child may need restrained, ask her caseworker or case manager to make a course in therapeutic restraint available to you. You can accidentally hurt her or get hurt if you do not know how to correctly restrain her. Any time you can, do not try to physically stop the behavior while it is happening.

Be sure to set a good example for her. Also, be sure everyone in your home does the same. Teach others to back off when she gets upset and angry. No, this does not mean she gets her way. It just

means everyone agrees not to push when she cannot control herself. She will calm down after a while. Try to stay out of her angry space.

Try small rewards for good days, days when she does not hit or hurt. A treat, special privilege, or something she wants all help. Use negative reactions very sparingly. The payoff for her needs to be for appropriate behavior, for not hitting and hurting.

Always talk to her after she has trouble. Sit quietly with her while she calms down. You can then talk about her angry feelings and how she managed them. She needs to learn to pick up on the signs she is about to lose control.

Say, "Once you get angry, stopping is very hard. You can learn to stop; but it is tough. It is easier to stop if you catch it before you lose control. If we can figure out when you first started to get upset, that is the place to control it. When did it first start getting to you?"

The goal is for her to spot situations and people that set her off. The best time for her to get control and to learn emotional management is while she still has control. As she learns to see situations coming, her control will get better.

7. They start or get into fights.

This is a two-sided problem. Children may bully and pick on other children and start fights. They may come out fighting any time they get frustrated, angry, or afraid. Some children may do things that aggravate others to the point of fighting. Either way, it is a problem.

Several things need some thought. Where did the child learn the behavior? Whether he is the aggressor or the victim, he learned the role somewhere. It is not true children often fight. By ten or so, most youngsters never get into physical fights. Those who do have a problem. They think that fighting is a good way to settle things. They may have learned this from their families. They also may have learned it from living in their neighborhoods or attending their schools. Some places are very rough. Fighting may be the normal way to handle problems within their group. Finally, it may just be one step beyond screaming and yelling, hitting and hurting. If these problems go unchecked, fighting and more serious violence are nearly certain.

What if you have tried all the tips discussed so far and he still fights? This is worth a try. Say, "Your fighting is a serious problem. We have tried several things over many weeks. (List the things you have tried.) You are still fighting. Here is the problem. I want to help you but wonder if I can. However you feel about it, I want you to know where I stand. If you and I cannot work this out, it still has to be worked out. The fighting has to stop. We will start with counseling. If that doesn't help, we will take the next step. I do not know for sure what it is. It may mean you will live somewhere else where you can get the help you need. I sincerely hope it doesn't come to that; but I want you to know it might. I will do whatever it takes to help you."

What if he says he does not care? Say, "That is a shame. I wish you cared. I care and will do what has to be done to help you over this problem. Nothing is happening today so we will have some chances to talk about this more."

8. They bully and pick on others.

This is worse than just fighting. Usually it is caused by the child's insecurity and low self-esteem. He needs to bully and act powerful. He is trying to hide his fear and self-doubt that are at the bottom of the behavior. Less common is a child who just likes to hurt people and control them. When this is what is going on, the child is very mentally sick.

Watch the child, his behavior, and his reactions. Does he want to be one-up and more powerful than other children? Does he get pleasure from seeing other children suffer? These are not the same and it does make a difference.

If his need is to be one-up and in control, you can usually help. The child wants people to respect him and like him. He has picked a way that does not work. They are afraid but do not respect him or like him much. Say, "Bullying and picking on Suzie is not a good way to get the respect you want. It just makes her afraid of you and causes others not to like you. It does not get you what you want. Even those who act like they think you are a big deal are not being honest with you. They are using you to feel important. Some of them are afraid and do not want you to treat them the way you treat Suzie. You'll have to decide whether you want to be a bully or have people like you."

He may say he does not care whether anyone likes him. Say, "It's your choice. I am just saying being a bully is not your best choice if you want people to like you. You have choices. If you are interested, I will think with you about some of those choices." Be sure not to miss the chance to teach but resist the temptation to preach.

9. They are cruel to others.

This is the end of the anger road. The behavior has become an end in itself. Hurting someone because he was angry with them was a serious problem. Hurting them just to see them suffer is very sick behavior. Here is the problem. Although a little teasing and tormenting usually is only good fun, too much is a serious problem.

It works like this. When children are about four or five, they begin to see things as others see them. It is sort of like they can go into the other person and feel what they feel. This is called empathy. By grade school, they do this fairly automatically most of the time. One value of

empathy is knowing when other people are hurting physically or emotionally. If they are, the child feels badly and wants to help. This is how she tells when enough teasing and tormenting are enough. When it stops being fun and starts hurting, enough is enough. Knowing just when to stop is a problem. But most children know about where the line is and respect it.

Children who are cruel on purpose and get pleasure from it are across the line. They want to see the other person suffer. Empathy or the pain of the other person does not stop the behavior. Usually, children showing this sign have themselves been victims of the behavior. Children learn what they are taught.

Here is an important point. Be sure no one in your home torments your foster child physically. Keep teasing to a minimum. Also be sure no one tries to get back at him. Do not try to teach him a lesson by hurting him. For example, biting him to teach him not to bite is a very bad idea. He needs gentleness, firm guidance, and a predictable family. Also, talk with him about his behavior, the feelings and pain of others, and about his angry feelings.

10. They lost interest in people and activities they had enjoyed.

This is withdrawal and not pouting. Think about this sign carefully. The child cares about people and activities. The problem is losing interest. Don't be too quick to think there is a problem. She may lose interest in some people and some activities. This usually has nothing to do with withdrawal. Maybe she got bored. Maybe she just got into other things. The sign is more than simply changing her interests.

Here is what to watch for. Are the people and activities being replaced by other people and activities? If so, a problem is unlikely. If not, the youngster may be withdrawing. This is a serious problem.

Here is what to do. Talk with her about what you have noticed. Say, "I have been noticing you are withdrawing from people and activities. It's not just changing interests. For example, (Give some examples.) you stay by yourself and don't seem interested in much. Will you help me understand what's happening?" She may tell you she is into her school work and does not have time for activities. If so, say, "School work is okay but a steady diet of it is too much. I think there is more happening. Talk to me about what happened with your friends and with the activities you had enjoyed." If you are patient and give it a little time, she will likely tell you what happened in her world to cause things to go sour.

11. They have trouble making and keeping friends.

Foster children are more likely to have this problem than most youngsters. Why? They are likely to have changed neighborhoods and schools. Their life-experiences usually have not taught them good interpersonal and relationship skills. They likely have low self-esteem and deal less well with the give-and-take of friends and the social scene.

Most children move out from a solid base at home into other relationships. This lets them try many relationships while always having those at home. Foster children do not have this solid base. Because of this, relationships they do find are more important to them. For example, they can easily become too possessive and smother the other person. This is a good way to lose a friend. Also, they may try too hard to please and to be part of the group.

Your foster child needs you to teach her about friends and relationships. Say, "Getting a friend starts by hanging around with people who are like you want to be. Pick people who seem to value what you value. Next, talk and join in without being pushy. After a while, you will notice you talk more with some of them than others. There will be two or three you talk with the most. You and they are becoming friends. There are also some ways to keep friends and ways that turn them off. We can talk about that as time goes on." By talking to her, you are showing her an example of friendly behavior. You also are teaching her some relationship skills. It is a slow but rewarding process.

This also will help. Include her in family activities at church, in the neighborhood, or in community organizations. This gives her a chance to see other healthy families and to make friends. Child-only activities may be too stressful for her at first. Family activities give you a chance to observe, coach, and support her.

12. They avoid people and social activities.

This is a sign that your foster child has withdrawn. Here is the problem. You could easily miss it. How? She may be very friendly with you, with other family members, and especially with adults. You say, "But everyone likes her." The problem is "everyone" includes few if any children.

If she has really withdrawn from everyone, she needs immediate professional help. Something drastic is happening. If the withdrawal is from other children and activities outside your home, it is serious but not so much of an emergency. She still has you and your family.

Try two things. Talk with her about what is going on. She may tell you what is happening and what she thinks and feels. This will give clues about how to help. Also, back off a little from being her best friend. You are the only mother (or father) she has right now. That is your job. If you are her main friend, it keeps her from needing to find other friends.

You can help her spend more time around young people her age. You may need to push and insist a little. Stay close but give her room to be with other children. Also, she likely will benefit from being in a group at one of your community agencies.

13. They only like activities they can do alone.

This can be near the end of the withdrawal road. This sign also may be seen in a child who never developed relationships with people. These children have their only relationships with things. They are sometimes seen as book-worms or, these days, computer nuts. Their only interest might be music, reading, television, or anything else where they do not have to deal with people.

Being clear about your goal is the key to helping your foster child. Your goal is not to get him to where he prefers people to his books and computers. It is only to get him to be a little more socially active.

Helping starts with your relationship with him. Show some interest in what he has read, in what he has learned to make his computer do, or in what he is watching on television. When he responds a little to your interest, feel good about your progress. Also, encourage him to tell others about his interests.

If you try increasing the time he spends with other children, don't make the big mistake. What is that? People often try to match a withdrawn child with the most social and outgoing youngster they can find. A better match would be with a child who is almost as quiet and reserved as he is. No, they won't bore each other to death. They also will not overwhelm each other.

14. They do not talk to anyone about their feelings and thoughts.

Usually this is because no one ever listened or cared about what the child thought and felt. Even worse, those who did acted like they cared did nothing but tell him what he should think and how he should feel. He told them what he thought. They said, "You don't really believe that do you?" "That is a stupid thing to think." "You shouldn't feel that way."

What to do? Ask him questions. Show him you are interested. Don't push him to talk. His relationship with you can be on his terms. You should talk to him about day-to-day kinds of things but don't expect him to respond. You are there and interested. He will talk to you when he wants to talk. Playing games and doing things where he does not need to talk also helps cement your relationship.

15. They want to keep their friends all to themselves.

This sign and how it develops in foster children was discussed earlier. It also is caused by what may be a little fact of human nature. It can be caused by jealousy, not having other friends, and the child's wanting to have what he has all to himself. Whatever the cause, it is a quick way for him to lose friends.

If your foster child is getting too possessive, talk to him. Say, "I want to talk with you about you and your girlfriend. It is just something I learned along the way. Here it is. If you are too possessive, she might like it at first. After awhile, she will want to spend time with her other friends and do stuff when you are not around. This does not mean she doesn't still like you. It just means there is more to life than one relationship. Here is the problem. It works better not to be so possessive to begin with. I think if you keep it up, you might push her away. I have a couple of suggestions if you want to keep her as your girlfriend." Be careful. In all likelihood, the relationship will not last very long anyway. The risk is making him feel breaking up was his fault whether his being too possessive had anything to do with it or not.

16. They often get their feelings hurt.

This problem is not as simple as it may first seem. It looks like the child is just too thin-skinned and unable to handle the give-and-take of being ten or thirteen. It is a rough time. Getting her feelings hurt happens easily if she lets it. This is a fact of life. Encouraging her to be a little tougher is good advice. The problem is this. The sign can be a symptom of other problems.

Children with learning problems are more likely to get their feelings hurt by teachers and by other children. It hurts when people call attention to her not doing well, especially if she has tried to do well. Children whose self-esteem is already low feel even worse when things happen that other youngsters would not think much about one way or the other. Children who have high stress in their lives are much more vulnerable than those who do not. Handicapped youngsters, children with other physical or emotional problems, and those who are already self-conscious for some reason get their feelings hurt easily. Being a foster child has its own problems. It really can be complicated.

It is not enough to encourage your foster child to be more thick-skinned. She needs help with her feelings and with how she thinks about herself. You can do this better than anyone since you are with her every day. You are there when her feelings are hurting.

Here is an idea. Take her side. Whatever happened, start by getting a little angry for her about what happened and with who did it to her. She matters; and her feelings matter to you. She needs you on her side right now. Advice and guidance can come later.

17. They are often the brunt of teasing and put-downs.

This is usually caused by a combination of low self-esteem and poor social skills. Some children are more vulnerable to this. Foster children fit that bill.

Children who have good social skills and high self-esteem can handle the give-and-take. Usually, they do not respond to the taunting. Also, they have ways of stopping it. Often this means using come-backs that are at least as nasty as the original taunt. It works.

Telling your foster child to ignore teasing and put-downs is good advice. But it only works up to a point and part of the time. Also, this does nothing to stop the assault on her self-esteem. It is better for you to stay out of it as much as you can. Be sure she is not using this problem as a new way for her to get your attention. She needs to deal with what is her problem.

Some coaching is good. She only needs to learn one or two social responses. She just needs to use them calmly while looking the taunter straight in the eye. Whatever the taunter says next, she needs only to hold her ground, keep staring, and keep her mouth closed. She might try saying this. "Thank you for sharing that with me. Are there any further examples of your ignorance you want to share?" If the taunter becomes more aggressive or keeps it up, the social puzzle is just that much more challenging. She has to use the response every time for at least ten or fifteen tries, though. By that time, she has started to be socially proactive about her problems.

18. They get up-tight and nervous when someone is angry or upset.

Getting a little up-tight and nervous is normal, especially for a child. Even for adults, the situation brings some uncertainty. The up-tightness is part of getting ready to deal with whatever happens.

If your foster child noticeably reacts like this more than once in a great while, it signals a problem. This is very true if he gets more upset than the person he reacted to. If he has the reaction when the anger had nothing to do with him, it is a bigger problem. When he reacts just because he thinks someone might get angry, the problem is even worse.

What is happening? The child is overreacting. Why? Because he fears something very bad is about to happen, and probably to him. Children behave like they have learned to behave. This is especially true for their emotional reactions. The child is afraid and fears he or someone else is going to get hurt.

Helping your foster child is not complicated but takes a long time. He will learn people get upset and angry at times. This does not mean anyone is going to get hurt or anything bad will happen.

Talk with him about his fears. Say, "You feel upset. I think you are reacting to someone else's anger and nervousness. It feels like you are afraid that you or someone else might get hurt. It does not work that way here. We all get angry at times. You can get angry too if something upsets you. Getting angry is okay. This is the difference. When we get angry, we talk to each other. Sometimes it gets a little loud; but that is as far as it goes. Here, we do not hurt each other. Watch to see if what I say is true. You may even want to let us know the next time you get angry about something. That is part of how we know what everyone is thinking and feeling."

19. They do not stick up for themselves.

A child with this problem is well along the way to social isolation. Recall the children who had problems with fighting. In many ways, they are getting along better than the child who just stands there and takes it. In the give-and-take, this child only takes. She may have learned to be non-aggressive for religious or moral reasons. If so, she will have a proud and self-controlled quality about her. More likely is a passive, "I have to take it," attitude. It is a whipped-puppy kind of thing. She is either afraid to stick up for herself; or all the spunk has been taken (probably beaten) out of her. Either way, it is a problem.

How to help? It is very tough. Do two things. Try to get her to stick up for herself, especially in situations that have adult supervision. Next, if she does not stick up for herself at home, be slow to come to her aid. Home is a very good place to practice. Here is the hard part. As she begins to stick up for herself, she will likely use primitive methods. She may hit, yell, or try other things that are problems.

Say, "You hit your sister. I am proud of you for sticking up for yourself. You have the right idea. Hitting is not your best choice. Next time, try just yelling at her. I don't know for sure if it will work better. It's just something to think about."

20. They try to please everyone and keep everyone happy.

This is a disguised version of not sticking up for herself. As you think about it, you will see what motivates the child. On the surface, she wants approval, positive feedback, and to be seen as a helpful person who causes no trouble. The last part is the key. Her main motivation is to cause no trouble. She wants to keep everyone from getting upset or angry.

Here is the problem. Instead of seeing the sign for the problem it is, people tend to see the behavior as positive, cooperative, and desirable. In some ways, it is. The question for you is how much and how often you see the behavior.

Trying to please everyone and keep everyone happy is likely the most common cause of tension and stress adults have. Think about yourself. How much of your stress is because of trying to meet everyone's needs, trying to keep everyone happy? You know it is unreasonable but may try to do it anyway. At least, you have a chance not to pass it on to your foster child.

Also, she learned what she was taught. Not pleasing adults or not keeping them happy may have lead to very bad things happening to her. It was her only hope for protecting herself. Even if there was no real threat, there may have been an alcoholic or mentally ill family member she felt responsible for. The family law said, "Do whatever you have to do to avoid upsetting anyone. Keeping people happy is your job. If anyone gets upset, drinks, or gets mentally ill again, it is your fault." Guilt, especially irrational guilt, is powerful.

Here is what you can do. Discourage the child from always doing things for people. Don't be so quick to let her help. Tell her it is not her job to keep people happy. She cannot make people happy. She would be better off were she a little more selfish and self-centered. You can help her with this.

21. They feel most people do not like them.

Most children feel like this sometimes. Some children feel this way most of the time. They really mean they believe most people don't like them. By now, you understand how these feelings and ideas develop in foster children. They grow out of low self-esteem, bad life-experiences, poor social skills, and a life with way too much stress. Your good relationship with your foster child helps a lot. But you can do more.

Start by believing him. Say, "Okay, most people do not like you. I am not one of those who does not like you; but most people are. If it is true, it must have something to do with how you act, how you look, or how you treat them. You must be turning them off. If we can figure out how you are doing that, we also can figure out how you can stop doing that. It's hard for me to see how you turn almost everyone off. That may be because I like you. Here is a place to start. How do they let you know they do not like you? That will be our first clue."

22. Most people their age dislike them.

This is the same as the last sign, except it really is true: most people dislike him. It is even worse if he does not understand that they don't like him.

Be honest with yourself and the child. Why is he so disliked? Along with this sign of relationship problems, which of the other twenty-one signs does he have? Your answer likely is "several." This means you and he have a serious challenge as you work together on his specific problems.

Example:

No one could tell how Randy was going to be from one minute to the next. Sometimes he was almost nice; but usually he was in a bad mood and hard to get along with. Anything could set him off.

Yesterday morning before school was a perfect example. Sue and Julio were coming in from the bus talking and minding their own business. For no reason, Randy yelled, "Hey stupid!" to Julio and then said something to Sue only she and Randy heard. Whatever it was, it embarrassed Sue and Julio said something back to Randy. That is all Randy needed.

It looks like Julio would have known to just keep his mouth shut. Everyone knows how Randy is. I don't want to repeat what he said; but you could hear him screaming all over the building.

When Mr. Miller arrived, Sue was crying. Julio was on the floor holding his head. Randy was standing around acting like the whole thing was Julio's fault.

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete this Brief Treatment Plan. What signs of trouble did you notice in the children in the example? Write each sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Another example:

Judy's foster mother and father were at the dinner table talking after Judy and their daughter had eaten and left the kitchen. "I'm worried about Judy," her foster mother said as Mr. Butler poured her another cup of coffee. He sat, waiting for her to continue. "It is hard to put my finger on it. She just seems to have lost interest in her friends and the things she had seemed to enjoy. I guess I don't know if she has any friends anymore. She talks on the phone sometimes but I don't think she does much with anyone. She just stays in her room and does things she can do by herself. She seemed to be adjusting well. I don't know what happened. I really am concerned."

Mr. Butler thought about what his wife had said and then said, "I know what you mean. It may be even more of a problem than you are saying. I know Terry asked her to go to the mall and she said she was too busy. All she did was watch television. I don't know if you have noticed it or not but the last few times someone has called her, she has made some excuse not to talk with them. Have you said anything to her about what you are feeling?"

Mrs. Butler did not know what to say. She finally said, "I've tried to talk to her. She says everything is fine and I am making too much of a deal out of it. She brushes it off and will not talk about what she is thinking and feeling. She just shuts me out. She acts like she does not have a care in the world. I don't know. I am worried."

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete this Brief Treatment Plan. What signs of trouble did you notice in the child in the example? Write the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

One more example:

Bill was determined not to let any of them see this time they were getting to him. "I am not going to cry. It's for sure I'm not going to walk away like I always do. They are not going to get to me this time."

The other boys could get down right cruel with their teasing. Maybe Bill did get his feelings hurt too easily. Who can tell? He just knew they were not going to get to him this time.

"Bill, Bill, big as a hill. Do you like to be so ugly? Look at him. Now he will probably start crying again. Cry for us, Bill."

Bill wanted to stick up for himself but was afraid. Mostly, the other boys ignored him; but they kept it up when they got bored and had nothing else to do. "Please leave me alone," he wanted to yell. Instead, he laughed and said, "Sure, being ugly is fun." That was the turning point. He learned going along and keeping them happy at least got him some attention. If he did what they wanted and was who they wanted him to be, he could be part of the group. They would keep him around to taunt.

"It's better this way," he told himself. "They don't like me anyway. Maybe if I just go along they will at least stop putting me down so much."

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete this Brief Treatment Plan. What signs of trouble did you notice in the children in the example? Write the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Helping your foster child with behavior problems:

The signs in this section are serious. Each one means the child needs professional help. As his foster parent, you will be asked to join him in his treatment. It is important for him for you to cooperate. Also, you will be given ideas about how to work with him at home. Be sure to follow the suggestions.

You will not find specific suggestions here about how to limit or control the child's behavior. For children with serious problems, this takes careful thought and a plan. Also, the plan has to be tailored to the individual child. What works for one child can make another child worse. This needs discussed with the child's caseworker to be sure you have the right plan for your foster child. There are no quick fixes.

Thinking about these signs will help you better understand the child and his problems. It also will help you see that, as his foster parent, your main job is to understand, be firm with him, and keep an open and gentle attitude toward him.

23. They do not follow the rules or behave like most children do.

Your foster child might follow the family rules and do what other family members do. Still, family outsiders may find fault. Following "the rules" depends on which rules are to be followed and the value placed on following them. If they are important, the child will usually follow the rules, whether or not most people see doing so as good. Children do as they are taught.

24. They do not accept the authority of foster parents, teachers, or others in charge.

Understanding this sign when you see it in your foster child can be hard. Why? There is a lot of difference between authority and power. Children learn to respect authority, people in authority, and learn to accept authority. This becomes a value. Power is different. It gets its importance from who is bigger and stronger. Power is something to fear; and people with power are to be feared.

How your foster child sees you, teachers, and other adults is important. Does she see you as people in authority or as people with power? She may say, "You can't make me do it." That is what she really means. "You cannot or will not use power to make me do it." She likely is right.

How can you respond to this? Say, "You are right. Even if I could make you do it, I won't. I will not treat you that way. I will help you learn it is better for you to do what I ask than to refuse. You can still refuse. Please do what I ask so we do not have to figure out what other choices we have."

25. They behave in socially inappropriate ways.

Think about whether your foster child really knows the socially appropriate ways to behave. Remember, this takes time. Just telling him is not nearly enough. He needs to try, behave inappropriately, try again, and maybe do it wrong again. Like other children, he also will sometimes act badly even though he knows better. You are looking for successive approximation. This means he comes closer to what you want as time goes on. No one always behaves well. Your goal is only for him to act more appropriately more of the time.

26. They use illegal drugs.

This is a very complicated problem. Think about it in terms of values: right and wrong, good and bad. Peer pressure is often a strong part of illegal drug use. The child gives in to peer pressure. From a value point of view, here is the idea. If the value of following the law, avoiding dangerous things, and doing what is right is stronger, the youngster says, "No." If not, peer pressure wins.

What was the child taught about following the law, using alcohol and drugs, and about what will be good for him in the long-term? He values what he was taught. Also, if he has been mistreated and got little respect, his struggle is up-hill. His stress is high and his self-esteem is low. His social skills are limited and his school success poor. It is hard for him to turn down something that might make him feel better and bring some social approval, even if it is not "good for him."

Don't react to his drug problem by getting angry. Don't lecture him. Above all, don't threaten him. Say, "It will be a great day when you understand you are important enough and valuable enough to treat yourself better. It will be a better day when you do not want to hurt yourself or run the risk of hurting yourself with alcohol and drugs. You deserve better."

Also keep this point in mind. Don't do anything to protect him from bad outcomes that his drug use causes. If he has problems with the police, they are his problems. If he gets into trouble at school, it is his trouble. If you cannot put up with his behavior at your home, don't put up with it. If he needs treatment, be sure he gets treatment. If he cannot control his drug use, be sure it is controlled for him. It may be the police or the court who has to do the controlling. When the line is not drawn firmly and calmly, it is called enabling. Do not be the one who enables his self-destruction.

One more point is important. There are some street-drugs that are very quickly addictive. Even a child who just gives into the temptation to try it once or twice can be almost immediately addicted. The child may be basically alright and get into real trouble before anyone knows what

happened. Get the child professional help right now. Do not wait to see if the problem goes away by itself.

27. They think rules and laws are for someone else.

Sometimes children have this problem in a somewhat backward way. They have been so put-down they do not think laws and rules will help and protect them. They just go along with whatever is happening because they are afraid not to go along. They believe they have no control over what happens to them.

For the same reasons, other children take whatever path is available since they believe they are on their own in the jungle. They need you to help them see rules and laws work for them. Teach them to get them to work for them.

More typically, you will see the child who does not have a conscience. He has few values; and those he does have are only those that get him what he thinks he wants. He learned what he was taught and it did not have much to do with laws and rules. For him, the only bad thing is getting caught. If the problem is to this extreme, he likely cannot be helped in a foster home. It is still worth a try anyway.

More common is a child on the value fence. Talk with him about your concerns and set a better example than he has had. Yelling, lecturing, and punishing will not help. They only convince him his view is right. He believes he only needs to get better at not getting caught.

He needs logical and natural consequences. What does this mean? It means, if he gets into trouble at school or in the community, it is his problem. Let him know you care but don't get him out of trouble. If people do not trust him, don't tell him they do or try to get them to change. If his behavior causes you not to feel like giving him privileges, don't give them to him. He will learn, with your help and professional counseling, the down-side of the behavior is worse than the up-side. He loses more than he gains.

28. They have friends who often get into trouble.

This is hard to prevent and harder to deal with. Here is the problem. When children pick their friends, they choose people who they think are like them or are like they want to be. What if he sees himself as a loser? What if he does not think he belongs in the in-group? He will choose his friends from the out-group. These are the youngsters who are having problems and getting into trouble.

He may just hang around with anyone who will accept him or at least not reject him. The out-group is not choosy. They will let anyone hang around who goes along and does not act like he thinks he is better than they are. They are an easy home-base for losers.

This is the problem. Telling him he cannot hang around with those kids does little good. You likely cannot stop him. If you do, he will have no friends. The children you like will not let him into their group. This is just a fact of life in the real world of children. He is only accepted by losers just when his need to belong is strongest. Add his need to belong to the fact that he no longer has his real home, if he ever had one.

29. They are not people others can depend on or trust.

This sign begins to get to the nub of your foster child's value problems. When he does not have solid values, it is much harder for you to know how he is going to act and what he is going to do. This makes it very tough to have a good relationship and tougher to live with him.

It is a vicious circle. The child's life-experiences taught him little in the value department. This caused him to be undependable and not trustworthy. Most everyone sees him this way and does not want to have anything to do with him. There is no payoff for him to work to keep relationships he does not have with people who don't like him anyway.

No, he will not work to get better relationships. He does not have any experience telling him he can get relationships or that having them is worth his effort. He does not change. People keep rejecting him. And it gets worse as time goes on and as he gets older. Around and around the vicious circle goes for him.

Logical and natural consequences will work with a couple of exceptions. First, he will usually think they happened because of his bad luck and not because of his behavior. Taking responsibility is not his thing.

Second, you cannot let everyone reject him. If you do, he is lost into the world of losers. You need to hang in there with him, even though you neither like nor approve of his behavior. Just maybe, he might come to value your relationship more than his unacceptable behavior. It is worth a try. Hanging in there may not be quite the logical thing. But if you were all that logical, you would not be a foster parent anyway. For you, love and caring are at least as important as logic.

30. They do not care if they upset or hurt people.

What would a child be like without values? She would not care about anyone or anything but herself. She might not even care much about herself and about what she becomes. The extreme version of this is not caring if she hurts people. The child has had her humanity taken away. She cannot have normal relationships. Even worse, she has been cut off from any chance to share in a feeling, caring world.

How can you help? You may get this advice. Do not let her know she hurt you. Do not let her get under your skin. If she does, act like she did not. The idea is not to let her know she won.

Here is the point. It is not a win or lose kind of thing for the child. She does not care. She needs to know she hurt you and how much she upset you. You do not let her know by getting angry and hurting back or by withdrawing from her. She needs you to really let her know in adult terms.

Say, "What you said (or did) upset me. It hurts way down inside. It is an awful feeling. It feels like I was just pushed off a cliff and am falling. I am afraid. It may be the worst feeling I have ever had. I am really suffering."

She likely will say she does not care. Now say, "That makes me feel even worse. Your not caring is worse for me than what happened. You do not need to say or do anything about it. I just want you to know how much I am hurting."

Will you ever get through to her? It is for sure not trying will never get through to her. She needs your caring and honesty: straight-up and to the point.

31. They get into trouble with the police or courts.

Any child might get into trouble once with the police or have to go to court. It might not be a sign of serious trouble. He learns and does not find himself back in the same fix. This sign is for children who get into trouble over and over again.

If your foster child is in this fix, the court will do what it needs to do. He will get some of those logical and natural consequences. What do you do? Help improve his self-esteem. Work with him on his social skills. Help with the serious learning problems he likely has. You can work with the causes of his behavior and adjustment problems. The courts and community will deal with the results of those problems.

Example:

Karen's boyfriend and she have been having sex for about four months. It is not something they talked about or made a decision about. It was just something each thought the other wanted and expected. He had been hitting-on her for a few weeks and one thing lead to another. Neither of them wanted to have a hassle in their relationship so that is the way it was.

"Do you want to party?" Karen thought she knew what he was asking but was not sure. She said, "Well, I don't know. Do you?" He said, "Sure, if you do." Karen did not want to seem like whatever he might think she was so she said, "Well, okay. Sure. Let's party."

"Drink up, it's only beer. Beer is nothing. I can get us some good stuff. Have you ever had a joint?"

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete the Brief Treatment Plan below, noting the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Another example:

This was Jeff's second time on probation. He was in court with several other people after a fight at a party. He managed to ditch the drugs he had been holding before the police arrived and now wanted them back.

"Where is my stuff? You have it and I want it back." John said, "I don't have it, man. I don't know anything about it." Jeff moved closer to John and said, "Now. I want it now." John was

getting afraid, "I'm serious. I don't know anything about your stuff. I paid you for what I got. That's it, Jeff. I don't know."

Jeff grabbed John and said, "I'm going to hurt you. You better give it to me now. You will pay one way or the other. Where is my stuff?"

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete the Brief Treatment Plan below, noting the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Helping your foster child with suicidal thoughts and feelings:

Sometimes children get so confused about what is going on in their lives and so down on themselves that they can hardly stand it. They may feel like running away or just giving up on themselves. These are awful feelings. They feel afraid, angry, and very upset. They have more stress than they can handle and their self-esteem is very low. They cannot get their thoughts straightened out or figure out their problems. There seems no end to their bad feelings. They believe they have come to the end of the road and don't fit or belong anywhere.

Killing themselves seems like their only choice. Looking at these signs that a child may be suicidal will be useful. As you consider the signs, give some thought to how vulnerable foster children are.

32. They have lost an important relationship and can hardly live without it.

The first idea to think about is "perception." This is how things seem from the child's point of view. Feeling she cannot live without a relationship is her perception of how she would be without the relationship. Seeing the relationship as important also is her perception. When you see this sign in your foster child, she perceives the relationship she lost was important, thinks it is gone, and believes she cannot live without it. It does not matter how others see or think about her and the relationship. Her perceptions are how it is for her. Perception is her reality and the only reason for her actions.

When working with her, start where she is, start with her perceptions.

It is easy to just say that what she thinks and feels is not true. Some people start by deciding that the relationship was not really so important. Others start by deciding that she has not really lost the relationship. They say to her, "Things will work out." Either way, these people think the child is wrong when she thinks she cannot live without the relationship.

Helping means getting inside her skin so you can see how she perceives what happened. Why does she think the relationship was so important? What makes her think she lost the relationship? Here is the most important question. Why does she think she cannot live without it?

Say to her, "I want to understand. Please help me understand. What about the relationship was so important for you? What have you lost that is so very important to you? Will you talk to me about what you are thinking and feeling?"

This is your goal. Her grief, anger, fear, and emptiness are real and painful. Her loss is real; and living past the pain feels impossible to her. To help, you need to share her grief, her strong feelings, and her pain. It is as if you take part of it into yourself. The child cannot handle it by herself. But between the two of you, you can.

Here is how you tell if you are helping. Can you feel her loss, her emptiness, her grief, and her pain? Is it a little as if the feelings were yours? If so, it is empathy.

Don't tell her how she should think or feel. More important, don't say her feelings and how she thinks about what happened are wrong. Listen and feel until empathy comes for you. You can then honestly say, "I am afraid for you. I am afraid for me. Maybe I do not totally understand; but I feel awful and hurt as if it happened to me. I want to be close to you and help us get through this. Can I share your grief with you and struggle through it with you?" Holding or touching her physically may make her and you feel better; but holding her emotionally is the key to helping her.

33. They became very embarrassed over something and cannot face it.

This sign begins to get at the main problem. Losing a relationship and feeling unable to live without it makes it seem like losing the relationship is the main problem. Thinking about her feeling unable to handle an embarrassment makes her pain more understandable. It has mostly to do with her loss or her fear of losing acceptance by other people. This idea needs more discussion.

An important part of the child's humanness is her connection with others or her feeling of belonging. A severe embarrassment breaks the connection in much the same way as losing a relationship. The embarrassment or humiliation changes how others think about her, or so she thinks. She believes that how they feel about her and how much she is accepted by them have changed.

This is the point. Whether she lost a relationship or felt embarrassed and humiliated over something else that happened, it feels like severe rejection. She feels cut-off and alone. It is an awful, empty, painful feeling. Added to this are feelings of anger and fear. She is angry about being rejected and afraid of not recovering from the loss.

When this happens, suicidal thoughts and feelings are likely. Why? Suicide is an escape from and end to the pain and a way out of the empty place.

To help her, get her to share her fear and anger. Say, "I can see how what happened was really embarrassing and humiliating. Recovering from something like that is very tough. Can we talk about it? I am not sure whether it would make me more angry or more afraid. What does it feel like for you?" Empathy and helping the child identify her feelings are what she needs from you. Just giving them names (anger and fear) helps her all by itself.

You and your foster child are really getting in touch with her feelings when she can let you know how angry she feels. It is the anger that can lead to violence such as suicide. Getting it out is her way out of her loneliness.

34. They are not getting over a serious loss or disappointment.

Here is how this sign works. Perception is the only reality for the child. Anything is disappointing if she feels disappointed. She is the judge. Also, she is the only judge of how disappointing it was for her. This means that not getting invited to a party can be more painful for one child than not getting a college scholarship is for another. Not making the basketball team can devastate one child and not bother another child much one way or the other. Listen to what the child tells you and believe her. She is the expert on her perceptions.

When a disappointment of any kind is very painful for the child, this is what's happening. She had started seeing herself as having what she wanted. In her mind, she was someone who had reached her goal. She made the team. She was part of the group at the party. She was going to be a college student. It matters little what the goal was. It had become part of how she thought about herself. More important, it was now a part of who she is with other people. In her mind, she is a team member, one of the group, someone who fits-in, who belongs. This is not an exaggeration. It is how children think about and understand important things.

The child's loss can be because of embarrassment and humiliation. It can be because a relationship is no longer there for her. It can be because of a severe disappointment. Whatever its cause, it is at least a little less belonging for her. She can get to where she perceives it to mean she does not belong at all, anywhere.

How can you help? Say, "I know a lot about disappointment. I think you may even know more than I do right now. I remember how awful and painful it feels. I remember it feels like a huge crash or sometimes like suddenly losing everything important. Can we talk about how you are feeling? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?" Your goal is to get her to talk about her feelings, especially her angry feelings.

35. They have lost a physical ability or skill and cannot handle it.

Helping your foster child with this kind of loss is somewhat different from helping him with other losses. Why? Other losses are one-time kinds of things. A physical loss is usually a lifetime adjustment. For example, what if the child loses his good looks in an accident? It is a problem for him right now. It also comes up every time he meets someone new. It also comes into his mind when he is not invited to a special event or feels slighted, whether it has anything to do with his appearance. The emotional pain of the loss keeps coming up. This means getting over the loss is not possible. He has to learn to live with what amounts to reliving the loss again and again.

Say, "This is not like losing a relationship or disappointment over something. This is not that kind of thing; and we both know it. This changes many things and it will take time to find out what that means. We will need to talk it through many times over many things. Can we talk about what you are thinking and feeling right now? I am feeling angry and afraid. Does this have anything to do with how you are feeling?"

36. They feel unable to do anything about what happens to them.

Take a minute to think about the signs already discussed, about foster children, and how the two go together. Now think about how rejection, not fitting in, and not belonging are parts of all the signs. Foster children almost always have one or more of the signs to some extent. This is even more true for feeling she cannot do anything about what happens to her. For the most part, this is more than a feeling, it is a fact. Heavy-duty stuff is happening and she can do little to nothing about it. She has little control and less ability to influence what happens to her.

How does this sign fit with the others? It is the can hardly live without it, the cannot face it, the not getting over it, the cannot handle it part of the other signs. It is her feeling of having lost control within her life and being unable to get control back.

Just as belonging is important to her, so is believing she is in control of what happens to her. At least, she needs to know her life is not out of control.

Here is the idea. She feels very little control. She also feels like she does not belong or does not fit-in. This is what is causing her bad, painful feelings.

Anger is a very bad feeling the child has about what happened to her. Fear is a very bad feeling she has about what might happen. She is angry about what happened, the position she is now in, and about her future's having been changed. Things are just not working out as they should, from her point of view. Fear is a little less complicated. Who knows what might happen? Even worse, she knows what might happen and it scares her. Maybe it will scare her to her death.

What does this have to do with control? She either did not or could not control what happened and is very angry. She cannot control what might happen and she is afraid. The less control she feels, the more angry and afraid she gets. It is a building pressure.

You want to help her get these feelings out. This holds most for her anger. There is another step you can take too. Give her as much power and control as you can.

Ellen was twelve when she came to our office with her foster mother. After about a half hour of her temper and generally obnoxious behavior, her foster mother reached her wits end. "I'm sorry but this is beyond me. Ellen, you cannot live with me anymore. I care what happens to you; but your behavior is more than I can deal with anymore." The placement was terminated by her foster mother on the spot.

After about a half hour, the foster mother returned with all Ellen's possessions: Two grocery bags of stuff. Fortunately, a new placement was available; and Ellen's new foster father came to get her and her two sacks.

This is the positive part of the story. About a year or so later, Ellen moved back to her mother's home. With her went her two sacks. Sometime later, we asked the foster father what she had in her two sacks. He said, "I have no idea. When we got her home and into her room we asked her if she wanted help putting her things away. As obnoxiously as possible, she told us they were hers and what she would do if we so much as touched them. She was right. They were hers."

You usually cannot do much about the big things that get out of control for the child; but it really is the little things that count. Let the youngster have as much control as possible over as much as possible. At times, this may only be her two sacks of stuff. You may offer her a shelf or drawer or the choice to leave her stuff in her sacks. As odd as it may seem at first, this may be your single best way to help her handle her anger and fear.

37. They have been thinking a lot about suicide.

You have seen how suicidal thoughts and feelings build in children. Anger and fear fester. At the same time, the child's perceived lack of control grows. The bad energy boils up and suicide becomes a solution. It starts as a possibility and slowly becomes the child's first choice.

The child thinks about suicide more and more. She considers it. She then rejects the idea. Finally, she reconsiders it, struggles to find other answers, and comes back to suicide as the only way out. Out of what? The way out of her anger, fear, pain, her emptiness. It becomes her final way of taking control.

Most times, she will tell someone about her thoughts and talk about her solution. If they believe her, whoever she tells can and usually does get help. Here is the problem. Far too often, no one takes her seriously.

Children do not normally say, "I wish I were dead." "I would be better off dead." "I think I will just kill myself." It is not true youngsters often say those kinds of things or are just joking around when they say them. If you ask them about it, they often do say they were not serious and were just joking around. Still, it is no joking matter and they likely were not just joking.

Your foster child may bring up suicide in a joking way. She may bring it up in a serious way. She may seem really down and you may ask after you have been talking for a few minutes, "What are you thinking about doing? It feels to me like you may be thinking about killing yourself. Am I on track or off base?" She may just start talking about suicide, someone who killed himself, or ways to kill oneself. However you learn about her thoughts, your chance to help is right then.

If she says she was just kidding, say, "Let's think about some better ways to get your feelings out. When you joke about killing yourself, what is your message? I'll bet it has something to do with feeling upset, something to do with feeling angry and maybe a little afraid. Let's talk about it if you will. What are you thinking and feeling when you joke about killing yourself?"

Talking about suicide helps. It neither makes things worse nor makes it more likely she will kill herself. Say, "I am afraid for you. I am afraid for both of us. Can we talk about what is happening?"

This is the most important point for you to remember. It is possible the child is threatening suicide to get attention but not very likely. But what if she is looking for attention? She can back herself into a corner if she keeps it up. She says it so much people stop believing her. She has to take it one step further if only to save face. The next step for her is really trying to kill herself.

Without a doubt, it was very serious the first time she threatened. If she is dead, whether she was serious or just wanting attention no longer matters. You will not get another chance to take her seriously.

What is going on with a child who uses threats of suicide to get attention? There are many possibilities, none of which is good. Say, "Part of me believes you want to kill yourself and the other part thinks you are using threatening suicide to get attention. Either way, I am very concerned. Can we talk about the getting attention side?" The conversation goes on for a little while and you then say, "Threatening is an effective way to get attention. You sure got mine. It worked. Here is my problem. When you use suicide to get my attention, it scares me and is a little frustrating. I like to pay attention to you so you don't have to scare me to get my attention. It's yours. I have some ideas but want to hear your ideas first. What are some other ways you could let me know when you want my attention?" You are starting to teach the child about good attention getting skills.

38. They have attempted suicide.

Most children who kill themselves have attempted suicide before. Also, many children who attempt suicide will later kill themselves. The point is a suicide attempt is always serious no matter how trivial it may seem at the time.

You can now see suicide is a process and not a single act. It is seldom just something that happened. The child thinks about it for a long time. The child adds up her losses, disappointments, humiliations, times she does not fit in, and when she thinks she does not belong. These all build up to feelings of not being in control, hopelessness, and being unable to make things better. A child who attempts suicide always needs counseling and special help. She also needs you and needs to talk about her fears and frustrations and about her anger and emptiness.

Example:

Things had been going from bad to worse for Holly for several months. It started when her brother died in a car wreck. He was her best buddy when they were not arguing. Steve was the only person in her life she could talk with about things that really mattered. Steve just listened and thought she was pretty.

She knew she would never get over Steve's leaving her but could have handled that and maybe even the stuff with her stepfather. At least she did not have to worry about dealing with him every day now.

Things got worse, though. She finally got up her nerve to try out for cheerleading and now wished she never had to go to school again. She thought it might be different in this school. "I should have left well enough alone. It does not get you many friends; but being the best Math student in the school should have been enough." She could hardly stop shaking inside when she thought about it, which was only a thousand times a day.

The competition was in front of everyone at a pep rally. It started out well enough until it was Holly's turn. Not only did she forget the words to the cheer, she fell into the pep band while trying to make a jump. If hurting herself were not enough, she also felt like the joke of the school forever it seemed.

Just when she knew it could not get worse, it did. A new boy in school moved in on her one special place. Not only was he a Math whiz, everyone liked him, including the Math teacher. Her teacher's saying, "Being the second best Math student in the school is nothing to feel badly about," only made her feel worse.

"There is nothing special about me. At least Steve thought I was pretty and now he is dead." It was all too much. Holly's world was out of control. "Being dead would be a relief. There is no way out. I can't stand this. I've got to do something to stop the pain. I just want out."

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete the Brief Treatment Plan below, noting the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

Helping your mentally ill foster child:

Mental illness is many things. Like physical illness, mental illness can affect anyone and has many forms. The first important point to see is that mental illness is not just one illness but is many illnesses.

It will help you to think about it in this way. There is the part of the young person that thinks and understands. You can call this part the child's mind. There is the part that feels happy and sad, frightened and calm, angry and joyful. You can call this part the emotions. Also there is the part that does things and takes action based on what the youngster thinks and feels. You can call this part behavior.

What is mental illness? The child's mind, emotions, and behavior normally work together as a team. When children become mentally ill, the three members of the team stop working together. They each start doing their thing and the child cannot get them to start working together again.

Some kinds of mental illness affect the mind the most. The youngster is unable to think clearly and understand things the way they really are. The world becomes a strange and confusing place for him.

Other kinds of mental illness affect emotions more and other kinds affect behavior more. Here is another important point. All types of mental illness affect the child's mind, emotions, and

behavior to some extent and in some way. When this happens, the young person finds it very hard to keep the three members of the team under control and working together. Keep this problem of teamwork in mind as you think about these signs of mental illness.

39. Their moods jump from one extreme to the other and they cannot control them.

It is important to make this point. When you see any of the signs in this section, your foster child needs a mental health evaluation and likely needs professional care. Having said that, it also is important for you to understand the signs and have some ideas about how to help the child at your home.

There are several reasons why your foster child might have trouble controlling his mood and emotions. The most likely is stress or excitement. The child feels upset or very excited; and his emotions are a little out of hand. Here is the important part of the sign. He cannot control his feelings and mood.

When a child gets excited or upset, he normally can settle down, at least for a few minutes. What you see is that he is having part of this sign. Both parts need to be there before you would say he has this sign. His moods are jumping to the extremes and he cannot control it.

A hyperactive child or a child with serious behavior problems often shows both sides of the sign. He may be happy and full of energy one minute and flip into near violence the next. He may be happy one minute and withdrawn the next. The change can be dramatic. He cannot control this flipping back-and-forth without professional help. This has nothing to do with mental illness but needs your caring concern.

Another cause of the problem is depression. A depressed child often does not act like you might expect her to act. You might think she would be in a down mood and not very active. Her depression may look like this but is just as likely to look quite different.

One look of a child's depression fits this sign well. Her moods and emotions flip around. For example, she may be very up and have a lot of energy and then down and withdrawn. She may be friendly and then angry for no reason you can see. The important thing is to see she cannot stop it and needs help with her depression.

Another cause of this sign is serious mental illness. If this is what is happening with your foster child, you would likely see one or more of the other signs in this section.

Here is what to know. Arguing and getting upset with the child only makes things worse. It is not a problem that has anything to do with discipline or willfulness. Her emotions and reactions really are out of control. She cannot help it. Patience and tolerance are in order.

40. They may go on extreme eating binges.

Like other signs in this section, this sign can have several causes. One likely cause is depression. It combines with the child's nervousness and up-tightness. Eating is something to do and a way of dealing with her nervous energy. It is somewhat like a natural tranquilizer. Eating too much can make a person sleepy and drowsy. This is useful if the child is up-tight. It feels calming.

Another cause sometimes seen in foster children is very different. A child who has been starved or has had food withheld from her as punishment may have this problem. When she eats, it is as if she fears it will be her last time for a long time. Understanding this makes it easy to see why she gorges herself. She also may sometimes hide food. It is like putting it away for a rainy day or one when there is nothing to eat. If your foster child has this problem, reassure her that food will always be there for her. Be patient with her.

Another cause is part of an eating disorder. This problem is called bulimia. The child's weight likely is about right for her height and age. She (or he) may be in some athletic activity such as gymnastics or wrestling. The child vomits to control her weight. After eating, she purges or gets rid of what she has eaten. As if trying to make up for it, she eats huge amounts of food in one setting. This is not just overeating. She may eat enough food to serve as meals for ten or twenty people. Keeping food away from her or locking up the food does no good and may make matters worse.

41. They may often vomit after eating or use laxatives to control their weight.

Vomiting after eating is most likely caused by a minor illness or intestinal problem. With any sign, a physical problem may be all or part of the cause. Your foster child is much more likely to be physically ill than mentally ill.

When vomiting or laxatives are the child's way to control her weight, she has a serious problem. She may have thought of it by herself or may have picked it up from a friend or something she read. The point is it is dangerous and both physically and psychologically unhealthy.

The problem is common enough you should watch for it whether you suspect the problem or not. Watch for your foster child's needing to use the bathroom right after or during meals. Pay attention to unpleasant or unusual odors in the bathroom or other rooms in your house. Listen for any hints or clues when she talks with you or her friends. Watch for unusual body odor or bad breath. Also notice gray or darkening teeth. The behavior can cause permanent physical damage and even her death if it goes to the extreme.

Talk with your foster child about the problem even if you don't think she has it. Talking about it will not give her the idea. It will teach her about the dangers so she knows about them when she hears about the behavior at school or somewhere else.

If you find out about or suspect the behavior, try talking with the child. Also, closely watch her for a couple of weeks. If it does not stop, get her professional help. You and she cannot handle this problem by yourselves. Even if the behavior seems to stop, keep an eye out. It is likely to start back up.

42. They may starve themselves.

First, keep this in mind. Dieting is never a good idea for a child under twelve or thirteen, unless directly supervised by a doctor. Even a day or so of eating little to nothing is dangerous for her. Here is the problem. While her food is cut way back, she does not grow. Even worse, she may never make up for the time she was not growing. This is very serious. A young child should never diet unless medically supervised. It is as simple as that.

For your teenage foster child, watching her weight is usually not a big deal, although checking with her doctor is a good idea. Even eating little to nothing for a day or two once in a while usually does not hurt anything. Be sure it is not extreme. Be sure it does not go on for more than a couple of days at a time. Also be sure it does not happen more than once in a while. If she has a weight problem, talking with her doctor is the place to start.

This sign has little to do with dieting or normal weight control. A child with this problem is starving herself. The first thing you would notice is her losing weight. This is a very bad sign. Next, you would notice her getting thin. Also you would see she is eating little to nothing. She might tell you she is watching her weight, is not hungry, or does not feel well. Whatever her reason is, she is not eating enough.

Here is the hard part to understand. Even though the child is already thin, she thinks she is fat or at least thinks she is overweight. How she looks to you does not fit with her perception of herself. Her self-perception is distorted or does not fit with how she really is. She has lost her ability to judge herself. She feels fat no matter what the truth is.

When you see this sign in your foster child, her need for professional help is urgent. You nor the child can handle the problem without help. You may get help quicker if you remember she can die from the behavior. It does have to do with depression and low self-esteem; but it is much more complicated. Professional care is always necessary.

43. They may not trust anyone and think people are out to get them.

Whether you should be concerned about this sign is a matter of how strongly and how often you see the sign. Also consider how you might feel were you the child. Maybe people are not to be trusted and maybe they are out to get him. Maybe he is right.

It is not unusual for a child to feel used sometimes and to be somewhat leary of people. It becomes a problem when he starts changing what he does or does not do, where he will and will not go. It is a problem when it interferes with his normal, day-to-day activities. The problem gets worse when he thinks people are trying to hurt him. This is more true if he is not sure who they are or if they are not people who would hurt him. For example, he might come to believe most teachers or maybe even you are trying to control his mind or find a chance to kill him.

Here is what to watch for. Are his fears far beyond anything real, beyond reason, or quite weird? Always remember he has had a difficult life. He has had people hurt him. He has been lied to and has been let down by those who he trusted the most. If you have taken these things into consideration and the sign still concerns you, the child has a very serious problem. He needs professional help.

44. They may have very strange thoughts and feelings they cannot understand or control.

A child may need help understanding her thoughts and feelings. She may need extra understanding from you and time to talk about what is going on in her life. Her thoughts and feelings may seem strange to her and be hard for her to figure out. At the same time, they seem normal and understandable to you. They are just part of growing up. They may be no surprise to you, considering her circumstances and what she has gone through.

There are two things that should cause you concern. If the thoughts and feelings make the child very uneasy and do not go away in a couple of weeks, counseling likely will help. Also, if they make you very uncomfortable, talking with the child's caseworker or case manager is wise. If the thoughts and feelings are violent or destructive, it is a sign of anger and rage and is something the child needs help with.

If the child's thoughts and beliefs are quite strange or very out of the ordinary, professional help is important. These kinds of things might include thinking he has special powers, people are controlling his thoughts, or other supernatural or far-out beliefs. Take time to be sure he is not just pretending or putting you on. Still, strange and uncontrolled thoughts and feelings can be a sign of serious mental illness.

45. They may have extreme fears that keep them from doing things most people the same age do easily.

Fear is a feeling any child will have from time-to-time. Normal fears can be very strong. They can make it hard to handle the give-and-take of his days and weeks. Still, these fears do not keep him from doing the kinds of things most children do. At the rough points, a little understanding from you and a good pep talk are enough to get him to get on with getting on.

Two types of fear are very serious. The first is fear of separating from home and important adults. The second is less specific. It ranges from being afraid of some things and situations to being afraid most of the time.

Fear of separating is called separation anxiety. This is often seen as a fear of going to school but comes up sometimes as a fear of being alone or of being left. Being afraid to go to school is interesting. It looks like the child is afraid of going to school. There may be a good reason to be afraid of something at school. You need to give this possibility a lot of serious thought. Usually, school is not something the child has any good reason to fear. The truth is he does not want to be away from home and fears the separation. If he gets quick professional help, three or four weeks usually get the job done.

For your part, the main thing will be to calmly but firmly make him go to school. You should take him if that is the only way to get him to go.

Other kinds of serious fears are more complicated. Your foster child likely has understandable reasons to be afraid. Bad things really have happened to her. She does not have many ways to stop things from just happening. Not having to live in a world where bad things happen and things just pop-off may be the best thing she has going for her at your home. Helping her understand your normal world is an important part of your work with her.

Once in a while, a child develops extreme and very puzzling fears. What start out as normal fears get so strong they keep her from doing normal kinds of things. Another child may start being afraid of things that are not real. She might fear odd things like becoming invisible, turning into a horse, being killed by rays from outer space, or something else just as weird. These fears are likely signs of mental illness and need checked out.

46. They may have trouble having people close or touching them.

This sign has to be extreme to be important. When it is, the child is mentally ill and needs long-term treatment.

Here is what to know. Usually, your foster child will be comfortable with touching, hugging, and having people close to him. By ten or twelve, he may like less of this type of attention, especially from adults. You will notice a lot of difference from child to child. Also, the foster child you now have may like this kind of attention some days and not others.

Whether he holds back or wants to be touched, ask yourself this. "Does he really want to do this?" Unless you are sure he does, take it very slowly and gently. Stay close but let him control the touching, especially when it is a gesture of affection or just playful. Why? He is the one to decide about touching and who touches him. Abuse and especially sexual abuse may have made physical contact a very sensitive point for him. Just go easy and let him set the rules and limits.

The best approach is to ask, "Would you like a hug?" "May I put my arm around you?" "May I look at the bruise on your leg?" While you are still outside his room and without opening his door, ask, "May I come in to talk a minute?" If he says you cannot, try to respect his wishes.

47. They may urinate or defecate in their clothes.

This is usually a serious problem sometimes caused by medical problems but more often by emotional troubles. Keep in mind that a child ten or twelve-years-old sometimes might have an accident. Even so, it is unlikely for children that old. If you see the sign in your foster child, a physical examination is necessary. A real physical problem may be the cause.

Here are a couple of things to know. Even if the problem is emotional, it can become physical if it goes on too long. Not regularly going to the bathroom causes physical problems. This means he needs medical care for the problem along with counseling. Also, there is not much you can do to help except calmly have him clean himself each time he has trouble. Making any more of it will only make the problem worse.

48. They may cut and hurt themselves on purpose.

Your foster child might cut or hurt himself and really just be fooling around; but it is unlikely. Even then, it will happen once or twice and stop. If the cut or injury is more than minor or if the behavior keeps happening, the child has a problem.

Talking to him about the problem and listening for other signs of trouble will help. This is a very serious problem. If it happens more than once or twice, he needs a mental health evaluation. Also look very closely for other signs you may have overlooked and do not accept the explanation that he is doing it for attention. It is much more serious than that.

49. They may have a strong interest in fire, watching fires, setting fires, and doing

things with fire.

A child might like to build fires and watch a fire burning. At the same time, he understands the danger and is careful. Also, fire is not something he thinks about much.

A child who has a problem with fire has a much different set of thoughts and feelings about fire. He thinks a lot about it. He looks for chances to set fires, to watch fires, and to do things with fire.

Before ten or so, your foster child's playing with matches or lighters may cause a fire or get you concerned in other ways. Usually this is a behavior problem and not a sign of mental illness. By ten to twelve, it is more than a behavior problem, although a simple accident can still happen.

If the child has a problem with fire, some effort to keep matches and lighters away from him is a good idea. Even taking time to teach him safe use of matches and fire cannot hurt and has helped some children. Also, talking with a fireman might have some educational value. These activities should not be used to frighten or scare the child. It is likely he has other problems that may be less easy to see.

Here is the important point. Getting angry with him or punishing him are likely only to make the problem worse. Talking is important as is a warm, safe family environment. Even when they are there for him, professional help is important.

50. They may hear voices and see things others do not hear and cannot see.

When your foster child has this sign, it is called hallucinating. The problem is most likely not a sign of mental illness. Hallucinations can be caused by high fevers or by drugs or some type of poison. Always consider these possibilities first. They mean she needs medical attention right now. Also, she may tell you about things that may seem like hallucinations when they are really dreams. At other times, it just seems to her like something odd happened when it did not. Any of these causes do not last long and do not come back up. Even at that, don't just brush them off as unimportant. Watch for other signs.

Here is the important point. If the hallucinations are a sign of mental illness, they will happen from time-to-time. Also, the child believes they are real. Usually, she will tell you about them, especially if you ask if she is still hearing the voices or seeing the visions. If not, you can likely tell by watching her. You will see she is watching the visions or listening to the voices.

Two additional points are important. First, this sign does not mean the child is dangerous. She probably is no more dangerous than other children. Second, she is seriously mentally ill. Helping

her will take long-term professional treatment. An important part of her treatment is getting to live in your home and having you and your family to care about her.

Example:

Barbara tried to think about the question her doctor just asked and then said, "What? I don't know what is wrong with me. I don't think I heard what you said." She got up and started walking around the office as she continued, "I just feel weird. It is like laughing and crying at the same time. It is like someone else is controlling me and playing tricks."

Sue, another girl in the group, said, "You should see her at school. I don't know what her problem is but she sure isn't normal. She isn't anything like she used to be."

The doctor asked Sue to talk some more about what she had observed. She went on to describe the changes in Barbara. "It is like she gets really high and nothing bothers her. The next time you see her, she is really down and will hardly talk."

Later Barbara was again talking. "I get so afraid I cannot stand it. It's like someone is talking to me, telling me these awful, bad things are going to happen. It says really bad things to me." She turned to face the wall and continued, "I know. I know what's going to happen. No. I will." She then went back to her chair and refused to talk anymore.

Brief Treatment Plan

For the example, complete the Brief Treatment Plan below, noting the sign in the left column and your action (what you would say and do to help) in the right hand column beside the sign.

Sign:

Your action:

1.

2.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH YOUR FOSTER CHILD - THREE

First Things First:

Culture is a lot of things. It is art and music. It is history and architecture. Culture is how people dress and what they like to eat. It is science and literature. It is all that defines a group of people. In this book, however, our main interest is in the behavior, attitudes, and adjustment of foster children.

Within this important context, you learn to be culturally sensitive and responsive to foster children placed with you. You learn about cultural elements, cultural differences, and prejudice.

You then learn about cultural ingredients and outcomes and how they can be either desirable or undesirable. Using cultural elements from several groups, you learn how to evaluate the elements. You also may add elements of your own. Through this activity, you learn when to support and nurture the child's culture and when there are problems needing your attention.

You next learn how to get to know your foster child's culture. You learn what you need to observe, what questions to ask, and what you should tell him about your culture.

Finally, you learn about child development. You see how culture shapes the developing child. In the final activity, you are challenged to identify positive cultural elements in your foster child. You finish by explaining how you will support and nurture them. Your cultural goal is to help your foster child become the best he can be, with style and pride, all the time, on purpose.

Getting Started:

Culture makes a difference. It is what makes one group seem different from another. For example, how can you tell English people from North Carolinians? "It's easy," you say? Of course it is. English people drink their tea hot and usually in the afternoon. North Carolinians drink their tea iced, sweet, and whenever they get the urge.

What's that? Isn't that the difference you had in mind? OK, let's try again. People from North Carolina talk normal English. Those people from over there have funny accents. There you go. Now you know how to tell the difference. Look for people who drink sweet, ice tea anytime and talk right. They are the North Carolinians. Everyone else is English.

Drink preferences and language are cultural elements. They also may be cultural differences. They can help you tell English people from North Carolinians.

Activity One:

Cultural Differences

What elements of your culture are special? How are people like you different from other people?

On the left, list three special elements of your culture. On the right, tell us how the elements make people like you different from others.

Elements	Cultural Differences
1.	
2.	
3.	

The example has some problems. First, it makes a big deal out of something that is not very important. Whether you like your tea hot or iced does not matter much. Drinking hot or ice tea has more to do with the weather than culture. Summers can get very hot in North Carolina.

Is language a more important difference? English people talk fine with each other. North Carolinians have no trouble talking to North Carolinians. The truth is that English people and North Carolinians also have no trouble talking with each other. Language is not an important cultural difference for these two groups. Can you think of a situation where language could be an important cultural difference?

The problem with the example is in the attitudes. People from England have funny accents. They are from over there. Having a funny accent is not good. Being from over there is not good either.

People from North Carolina talk normal English. They know how to drink tea right too. They are right and people from England are wrong. The better folks are from North Carolina. The worse folks are from England. You are either one of us or you are one of those less desirable English people.

Of course, the problem is prejudice. Phrases like "funny accents," being from "over there," and "those people" are nothing but ugly prejudice.

Activity Two:

Prejudice

What do they say about people like you that is not true? What prejudices do others have about your people?

On the left, list three things people say about your people that are not true. On the right, explain how they are prejudices. What is the truth about your people?

What they say:

The truth is:

1.

2.

3.

If you and your foster child have the same culture, things are fine. Problems only come up when your cultures are different. That's when prejudice gets in the way. Do you think your people are

better than hers? Does she think hers are better than yours? In short, are either of you being judgmental and putting the other's culture down? You need to be non-judgmental and accepting of your foster child and her cultural heritage. She needs to learn to accept you and yours.

Prejudice is never good but is even worse and more destructive if it thrives in a foster home. Your foster child will have her prejudices. This means you and she have some work to do. You too will have your prejudices. This means you have more work to do to be sure they are not interfering as you work with your foster child.

Activity Three:

You, Your Foster Child, and Prejudice

On the left, list three cultural elements that might cause problems between you and your foster child. These are elements where you or your foster child might have problems with prejudice. On the right, explain how the prejudice could cause problems if things are not discussed and worked out.

Prejudice	Possible Problems
1.	
2.	
3.	

Here is another idea. You know about cultural elements and cultural differences. Some are more important than others. You also need to know that some are more dominate than others. What does this mean?

Aggressiveness can be a cultural element. Some people are more aggressive than others. For example, boys are more aggressive than girls. It works like this. If you observed a thousand boys and a thousand girls, the boys would be more aggressive than the girls. The difference would be very little, though. Aggressiveness is not a very dominate element. If you took out the few most aggressive boys, there would be no difference. You could not use aggressiveness to tell the boys from the girls. It was only a few very aggressive boys that made it look like there was a difference to begin with.

Here is the point. When you think about a cultural element or see a cultural difference, ask yourself these questions. Is it important? Does it matter? For example, children from the South talk a little more slowly than children from the North. This is a cultural difference but does not matter. It is not important.

Does it hold for everyone in the group? Is everyone in the group like that? For example, do all North Carolinians drink ice tea or are all boys aggressive?

Also ask if there is really all that much difference. For example, Italians are more emotionally expressive than Germans. How much difference is there? Not much. Italians are only slightly more emotionally expressive than Germans.

Not every cultural element is important. But some are very important. These are the ones that are dominate in your foster child's culture. Dominate elements need your caring attention.

Activity Four:

Dominate Cultural Elements

On the left, list three elements that are dominate in your foster child's culture. They are important. They are seen in most people in her culture. They make a difference between her and you. On the right, explain what kinds of problems could come up.

Dominate elements

Kinds of problems

1.

2.

3.

Ingredients and Outcomes:

The idea of ingredients and outcomes is important. If you make a cake, the flour, sugar, and other things are the ingredients. The flavor, texture, and aroma are outcomes. The same is true for culture. Some elements are ingredients and others are outcomes.

For example, inner-city children see a lot of violence. They see people use violence to solve problems. They learn to value violence. Violence is then an ingredient in their culture. It is something that gets added to who they are.

Inner-city children also are likely to get into trouble with the police. Their violent behavior gets them into trouble. Getting into trouble is an outcome and not an ingredient. The difference is important.

Think about the cake again. There could be a problem with the ingredients. The flour or sugar might be bad. The same is true for culture. For example, violence is a bad ingredient. What do you learn from this? Just because an ingredient is cultural does not mean it is good or desirable. It usually is but may not be. The same holds for outcomes. Some cultural outcomes are not good. Sometimes cultural ingredients lead to things no one wants or thinks is acceptable.

You will see culturally significant behavior in your foster child. Usually, you will want to support and nurture the behavior and the child's cultural heritage. At times, though, what you see is neither good nor acceptable. It is a bad cultural outcome. At those times, you need to discuss the behavior with the child and deal with it as a problem needing solved.

Activity Five:

Evaluating ingredients and outcomes

Here are some ingredients and outcomes you might see in your foster children. For each of the seven groups of children, we have included five elements for you to evaluate. Use the new skills you now have to answer these questions for each element.

Is the element actually a cultural element for the group? At least some of the participants in the research for this book have said that each element listed is an important cultural element for the specific group. You need to use your judgement and experience to evaluate this. What do you think? In the chart below the element, you are asked, Y/N Cultural element? Circle *Y* (Yes) if you think it is a cultural element for the group. Circle *N* (No) if you do not think it is.

Is the element a cultural ingredient or an outcome? Circle *I* for Ingredient or *O* for outcome. If it is not a cultural element for the group, skip this question.

Is the element desirable or undesirable? Circle *D* for Desirable or *U* for Undesirable.

If you see the element in your foster child, will you support and nurture the element or manage it as a problem? Circle *S* for Support or *P* for Problem.

If the element is a problem, how will you manage it and still be supportive and nurturing with the child? Try to make a direct statement. "I will (do this)."

All Foster Children

A participant in the research suggested that foster children should be thought of as a cultural group. They have more things in common than most other groups of children. These elements are for all foster children.

Have health problems and are often ill.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have very low self-esteem.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have difficulty dealing with day-to-day stresses and pressures.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have learning problems.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Do not talk with adults about important things.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Minority Foster Children

Have difficulty experiencing and expressing their sexuality.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have difficulty with language, ideas, and communication.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Feel foster parents and other adults have it in for them.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Do not stick-up for themselves.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Feel depressed and alienated.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Inner-city and Other Poor Foster Children

Consider it a virtue to be tough.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Do not place value on education.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Feel that people cause bad things to happen to them.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

See violence as necessary for survival.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

See themselves as outside society's laws.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

African American Foster Children

Get bad grades.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Value their independence so much that they do not accept help.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Feel powerless in a white-ruled society.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have to obey the law closer than others to stay out of trouble.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

See a lot of violence, homicide, and family separation.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Hispanic Foster Children

Are very non-verbal.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Do not see crying as bad, even for adult males.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Are quick to get angry but just as quick to get over it.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Are loose about time and do not value doing things on time.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have macho personalities (males).

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Asian and Refugee Foster Children

Are very perfectionistic.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Stress "success" over everything else.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Are loyal and honest mostly only with their own kind.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Easily feel a loss of honor and become embarrassed.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Are real no-touchers and avoid touching or being touched.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Native American Foster Children

Do everything in their power not to cry.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Have been conditioned to be passive.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Value experiential learning above directed learning.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Think about time in a different way from the dominant culture.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Do not accept the authority of foster parents or teachers.

Y/N Cultural element? I/O Ingredient or Outcome? D/U Desirable or Undesirable?

S/P Support or Problem? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What other cultural elements belong on the list for this group? Add them here.

Finding Out About Your Foster Child's Culture:

Your latest foster child is from a distant planet. His homeland is called World Six. People from there are known as Sixites. Your first task is to understand Sixite culture. You want to know enough to support the best cultural elements in your Sixite foster child. What do you need to know about World Six and about Sixites to have a good cultural perspective?

You are in trouble right off the bat. You do not know anyone else from World Six. You cannot visit the planet and you know nothing about Sixite culture. If you had grown up on World Six, you would know. If you were a Sixite you would know. If you could talk to some experts on Sixite culture you would know. The Sixite child is in your home and you need to be culturally appropriate today. You will need to learn everything you can from him.

You discover that your foster child came with a certification tag. It certifies that he is a bona fide human child. He has the same needs, problems, and growing pains that any other child would have. So far, you are not much better off. All the foster children who come to live with you have the same certification. To be culturally appropriate, you need to look further.

You can only learn about the child's culture by observing him and asking questions. You want to know the positive things about being a Sixite. You must make sure you support and nurture these positive cultural elements in the child. Also, you want him to adjust well in your home and to learn about your culture. You want to respect and affirm his culture and expect him to reciprocate.

Activity Six:

Getting to know a Sixite

On the left in the order of their importance, list three activities or situations you will observe. To the right of each, explain what you expect to learn about your Sixite foster child's culture.

Activity or Situation

You expect to learn

1.

2.

3.

Next, in the order of their importance, what three questions do you want to ask him? You will learn about his culture by asking these three questions. To the right, explain what you expect to learn.

Questions

You expect to learn

1.

2.

3.

You also want to let your Sixite foster child know about your culture. On the left, list the three most important things he should know. In the middle column, explain how you will

introduce these things to him. To the right, tell us how knowing these things will help him adjust better in your foster home.

Should know:

Introduce by:

1.

2.

3.

Helps because:

Culture and Development:

A child's development has several dimensions. His culture can be understood by seeing what is important within each dimension. The first is the *physical* dimension.

From birth to about three-years-old or so, development focuses mainly on growing and developing physical skills. Children learn to walk and talk, run and play, eat and go to the bathroom. They will get stronger, better coordinated, bigger, and will keep on growing and developing. But for now, life for the little folks is mostly a physical kind of thing.

Sure, they have emotions. They are rather basic. Little children get angry and afraid. They are loving and happy. They also are becoming social. They like some people and are uncomfortable with others. They know they belong with some people and not with others. They like to play, especially with other children their age. Nonetheless, the developmental emphasis is on physical kinds of things.

Even at this very young age, culture is influencing and shaping the growing child. He learns about touching and being touched, eating and food preferences, playing and interacting physically. He also learns physical skills and endless things about people and his environment. Cultural learning includes boy stuff and girl stuff, kid stuff and adult stuff. The foundation for his behavior, skills, and sense of where he fits into the physical world is being laid; and culture is the primary teacher.

Culture and development begin to blend even more with each other when children are about three-years-old or so. From then until about five or six, children are in the *emotional* dimension. Culture becomes increasingly important. Their physical development continues; but emotions take center stage.

During these preschool years, children learn about their emotions and how to manage them. To effectively work with them, you certainly need to understand what they are doing. You need to understand how they feel about it as well. They are now two-dimensional. You need to consider both dimensions.

Emotional management is an important part of cultural learning. If the child gets angry, how does he let people know? When does he do this and where is it acceptable to get angry? He cannot behave however he feels, whenever he feels it, wherever he happens to be. There are rules and expectations about those types of things. His culture begins to shape who he is and who he will become.

At about six or so, the *moral* dimension becomes central. Cultural learning is even more important. Within the moral dimension, children learn about moral and spiritual things. They learn about right and wrong, good and bad, what they should do and what they should avoid. They learn about what is important and unimportant. They learn about nature and other powers and influences beyond people and day-to-day events. They learn why people value what they value and believe what they believe. Culture is more-and-more defining who they are and who they will become.

By six or so, understanding and working with children requires a three-dimensional approach. You need to understand what they are doing. Additionally, you need to understand how they feel about it and what it means to them in a moral sense. Once children get into school, this three-dimensional perspective becomes four-dimensional. The *social* dimension starts to dominate. Culture becomes the primary influence on the child's adjustment.

Within the social dimension, children learn many new things but also need to use everything they have already learned. They use behavior and physical skills they already have. They need to manage their emotions in ways they have learned. They take their moral values and beliefs into the social arena. They will learn more and experience more; but their cultural foundation has been laid.

What happens within the social dimension? Children learn about relationships, groups, and everything social. Here is where they learn to associate with some people and not others. They learn about managing work and play. Responsibility and how others see them become ingredients in their development. They learn where they fit into the scheme of things and who they can and cannot become. They are members of some groups and not others. And culture is leading this development.

There are two more developmental dimensions that rest almost totally on the four that have come before. These two new dimensions are the sexual and intellectual dimensions. Children learn how to manage themselves sexually. They also learn who they are and how to function as intellectually autonomous adults. By late adolescence, children are fully products of their culture.

Activity Seven:

Cultural ingredients and outcomes

Within each dimension, children's development is shaped by their culture. Cultural ingredients and outcomes can be seen within each dimension. For example, moral ingredients lead to moral outcomes for the child. Sexual ingredients lead to sexual outcomes.

For each of the six dimensions, what ingredients and outcomes have shaped your foster child. For each dimension, list one cultural ingredient that has shaped the child in a positive way. Beside the ingredient, note what the positive outcome is. Below that, explain what you will do to support and nurture that positive cultural element in your foster child.

Physical

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.

Emotional

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.

Moral

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.

Social

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.

Sexual

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.

Intellectual

Positive Cultural Ingredient

Positive Cultural Outcome

How you will foster and nurture the element.