

# Rise

## Healing Together

A resource guide to parent-child therapy in New York City.

### INTRODUCTION

Most parents whose children enter foster care are required to take parenting classes. Usually, that has meant going to a weekly class where an instructor talks with parents about children's development, family routines, discipline and safety. However, another kind of parenting program is parent-child therapy, where a parent and her infant or toddler play together with the support of a therapist. The therapist gets to know the parent and the baby, helps them connect through play, and supports the parent in understanding and responding to the child's emotional needs.

In New York City, parent-child therapy is now available in every borough—for parents with children in foster care, and for those reaching out for support on their own. This special resource guide from Rise includes stories by real parents who have gone to parent-child therapy as well as a list of organizations that provide this service.

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## 'It Helps You Create That Special Bond'

*Two mothers explain how parent-child therapy helped them.*

*Kira Santana and Sara Werner are two mothers who have gone to parent-child therapy at the Albert Einstein Early Childhood Center's Infant-Parent Project. Here they describe their experiences:*

**Sara:** If you have the chance to come to this kind of parenting program, I would recommend it. Definitely.

Nobody forced me to come here. I chose to come. My case-worker said, "The program would be a good way for somebody to help you and your child learn to be with each other, and for you to learn to take care of him."

I thought it would be fun because it's an extra hour I get to spend with my son on top of my visits, and the foster parent can't make up excuses about why she couldn't bring him, because the judge values the program.

This program lasts for 26 sessions. When I heard that, it sounded like a really long time. Now I wish it could last longer. That's how good it's been.

**Kira:** It helps you create that special bond between a mother and child, and you feel more connected to your child that you did before. The more connected you feel, the more understanding you feel of your child. You know what your child wants and how she is going to try to get it.

When my daughter wants me to pick her up, she'll corner me, stand up by herself, put her hands up—and if anyone else gets near me, she'll push them and cry like someone is trying to hurt her. Just for me to pick her up!

When Claudia is upset, she'll cry like a banshee. The only way to calm her down is to either play

what she wanted.

With Dr. Alkon's help, I got to understand my daughter a little more. When she cries, I know what she wants now.

**Sara:** When I first came, I was nervous. It's not easy for me to trust people because of all the things I've been through. It's like I

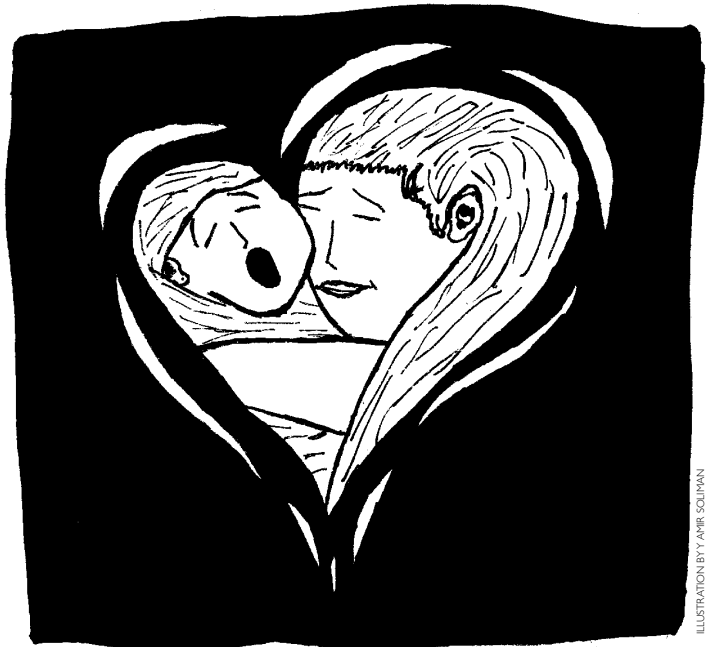


ILLUSTRATION BY AMIR SOLIMAN

music or rock her back and forth. My parenting therapist, Dr. Alkon, helped me figure out how to help Claudia using music. If I tried to give her a toy, she would just throw her toys. When we play Twinkle Twinkle or Elmo songs, she'll calm down. Then she can try to use sentences and explain

want to let people in and feel like I can trust them, but it's hard. I get fearful because I don't know how new people will react.

Not knowing my parenting therapist, Hazel, at first, it wasn't easy for me to trust her: I was afraid she would be just waiting for me

to make a mistake—like she'd write a list to the court saying, "At 1:45 this mother couldn't calm her son down." But it's not like that. She's actually helped me see that, when a mistake happens, it's not completely my fault.

Just last week my son fell. He tripped and he bit his lip when he fell. It got me all upset. I don't like seeing my baby hurt.

Plus, what if everybody says this was my fault? Are they going to hold it against me? Is this going to be the end even though I've been working so hard to get him back?

Hazel told me, "It's not your fault. He's learning to walk. He's going to be a bit wobbly. And he's exploring his surroundings. When kids are learning, they fall down. You can't catch him every second." She didn't blame me. What a miracle!

I didn't have a blind trust in Hazel. I changed my mind from experience. I can see for myself that she's not judgmental, she believes in me and she's not letting me down. She's a good person. I can trust that I can tell her if something is getting me down.

**Kira:** When I play with my kids, it's like I become a kid myself. My son likes to pretend he's a ranger, and we'll play games, run after each other, go on missions.

Before I came to the parenting here, I'd almost become too much like a kid. It was hard for me to tell my kids, "Don't touch this, don't take that." I'd feel bad. I didn't want to see them sad.

I was abused as a child, and I was always sad. It was hard for me to believe I wasn't doing something wrong if I made my children upset.

Now I understand that I'm teaching them right from wrong. I want them to enjoy their childhood but I don't want them to get hurt. Even if I'm a child at heart, I have to set rules for my children to help them in the long term.

I want my kids to be able to think to themselves, "If I do this, that will

happen." I've learned to give consequences and rewards. If my oldest son acts up, he can't watch TV or go to his cousin's house. If he behaves, he gets to go to the park.

With my youngest, he will throw toys when he's mad. I tell him, "You throw, I take." At first, I felt bad, because he hates that. But he knows now that if he throws a toy, I will take it and he

**'I'm learning techniques to help my children. I am learning to be patient. When I feel calm, I can focus more on solving the problem.'**

won't get it back. It teaches him that he can't get his way all of the time.

My oldest son and I live with my mother, and I see now that she babies him. When I tell him no, she yells and screams. I needed the parenting with Dr. Alkon to figure out how to handle things differently. Without it, I think I would get so stressed out when my children misbehaved, not knowing what to do. I didn't know how to bond with my children without completely giving them everything they wanted.

**Sara:** Part of the reason that my daughter went into foster care was that I would react so strongly to little mistakes that I made with her. I was so afraid because I was living with an abusive man, and he would give me the message: "If she has one single scratch on her, I'll kill you." I also felt like my heart was breaking every time my daughter cried.

One day I was cutting her nails and I made a mistake and cut her skin. It was a little scratch, but she was bleeding and crying a lot. I felt her pain on me. I felt worse and worse and worse until I couldn't stand it anymore.

The good part is that I brought my daughter to my social worker. The bad part is that I left my daughter and tried to hurt myself. Now I realize that that was a strong reaction. I could've had my social worker help me calm down and calm my daugh-

ter down. It's not like her life was over. She just got a little scratch.

Now I'm more able to calm myself down. In court, Hazel tells the judge and the agency how much better I'm doing.

At this program, I'm also part of a writing group with other mothers and I see that they make mistakes,

too. That's helping me not react as strongly to my own little mistakes.

**Kira:** When my kids went into foster care, I felt like I had failed. I still don't really see myself too positively but I try to feel more positive about

myself than I used to. Dr. Alkon tells me that I'm improving.

I know that, in this parenting program, I'm learning techniques to help my children. I am learning to be patient instead of getting upset right away. When I feel calm, I can focus more on solving the problem.

At first I didn't want to set rules for my kids and make them follow them. Now I understand that my kids will think, "Mommy's being mean! Mommy's no fair!" They're kids!

I say to myself, "If my kids don't learn to follow rules, what's to prevent them from going out and joining gangs or getting into other trouble when they grow up?"

I'm making rules to protect my children, and I'm doing that in a positive way. That's going to help them achieve in life.



**HEALING TOGETHER**  
A RESOURCE GUIDE TO PARENT-CHILD  
THERAPY IN NEW YORK CITY.  
[www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org)  
112 W. 27th St. #607  
New York, NY 10001  
646-543-7099

**DIRECTOR**  
NORA MCCARTHY

**EDITORIAL DIRECTOR**  
RACHEL BLUSTAIN

**SENIOR WRITERS**  
SONIA DIAZ  
PIAZADORA FOOTMAN  
ANTOINETTE ROBINSON

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**

TYESHA ANDERSON  
TERESA BACHILLER  
LAMORA BEARY  
ASHLEY BREWSTER  
GIANNINA BRITO  
CARLA BURKS  
CARMEN CABAN  
TRACEY CARTER  
WANDA CHAMBERS  
LAQUANA CHAPPELLE  
NANCY COLON  
LAWANDA CONNELLY  
RHONNEIL COOPER  
LATISHA DUPREE  
SANDRA EVANS  
SYLVIA FLORES  
TAHITIA FOGGIE  
NICOLE GOODWIN  
QUANDA GREEN BARNES  
LINDA HARVEY-PEARSALL  
YASHEAMEIAN HAMILTON  
ERICA HARRIGAN-ORR  
TONI HOY  
SABRA JACKSON

**CONTRIBUTOR**  
SARAH JOHNSON

**PRODUCTION**  
JEFF FAERBER

**ART INSTRUCTOR**  
JOANNE PENDOLA

ANNA JONES  
CODEE JONES  
NICOLE JONES  
BEVANJAE KELLEY  
EBONIE KING  
ROBIN LARIMORE  
LYNNE MILLER  
KEYSHANA MIMS  
HERBERT MORALES  
LASHONDA MURRAY  
DESIREE NAVARRO  
ILKA PEREZ  
SYLVIA PEREZ  
KATHY RANDO  
LORENZO RANSOM  
CHRISTAL REDDICK  
WANDA RODRIGUEZ  
DESIREE RUIZ  
SAMANTHA RUIZ  
KIRA SANTANA  
MARY THUNKER  
JEANETTE VEGA  
SARA WERNER

# Where to Find Parent-Child Therapy

## Bronx:

**Albert Einstein College of Medicine Early Childhood Center Children's Evaluation and Rehabilitation Center (CERC) at Einstein** Provides relationship-based parent-child therapies for children under 5, working with many families in the child welfare system and with many families affected by trauma. Also provides services for children under 5 with developmental concerns and their parents. Therapy models include: Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), and the Incredible Years. Referral required.

### Contact Information

1731 Seminole Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10461  
Referrals to Yajaira Colon:  
(718) 430-8900  
www.einstein.yu.edu

Director; Early Childhood Center:  
Susan Chinitz, Psy.D.,  
(718) 430-8900, susan.chinitz@  
einstein.yu.edu

### Center for Babies, Toddlers and Families at Einstein

Offers a Group Attachment-Based Intervention - a small group for parents and their children under 3 that meets 3 times a week and is aimed at supporting children's secure attachment, preventing maltreatment, and helping parents reflect. Works with child welfare-involved families. No diagnosis is necessary. Services are covered by Medicaid. Program lasts about 6 months but can be extended. No referral is necessary; parents can call for an intake.

### Contact Information

Center for Babies, Toddlers and Families  
1225 Morris Park Avenue, Building 5  
Bronx, NY 10461  
Intake: Ask for Claudia:  
(718) 839-7200

**Albert Einstein Infant-Parent Project** Partnership between Albert Einstein College of Medicine Early Childhood Center and Bronx

Family Court provides parent-child treatment to parents of young children involved in family court. Program is open only to families:  
1) who have children age birth to 3 who have cases with the Bronx Family Court;  
2) for whom the goal is reunification;  
3) who live in the Bronx or upper Manhattan.  
Referral required.

### Contact Information

2715 Bainbridge Ave., 1st Floor  
Bronx, NY 10458  
To make a referral contact:  
Clinician: Miriam Alkon, Psy.D.,  
(347) 918-8612,  
miriam.alkon@einstein.yu.edu  
Clinician: Hazel Guzman, M.A.,  
(347) 918-8613,  
hazel.guzman@einstein.yu.edu  
*Referral form available for download on website: www.einstein.yu.edu*

### Chances for Children Institute at Riverdale Mental Health Association

Offers parent-child treatment for families with children 0-5, parent-child playgroups, and professional training. Interventions use evidence-based models. Appropriate for all families, including court-involved. Services in English and Spanish.

### Contact Information

Chances for Children in Highbridge  
1178 Anderson Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10452  
Referrals: Hillary Mayers,  
(917) 441-0119

Chances for Children at Riverdale Mental Health Association  
5676 Riverdale Ave  
Bronx, NY 10471  
Referrals: Denise Ramos, intake department (718)796-5300 x117  
www.chancesforchildren-ny.org

### Co-Op City Family Services (JBFCs)

Works with the entire family in family therapy, with children up to age 18. Parents do not need a referral, though Co-Op does take ACS referrals/families involved with child

welfare. Evidence-based program involves the entire family and typically lasts about one year. No diagnosis is required.

### Contact Information

135 Einstein Loop, Room 46  
Bronx, NY 10475  
Intake: (718) 798-7801  
or (844)663-2255  
Director: Pierre Thomas, LCSW,  
(718) 320-3082

### Jewish Child Care Association

Families coping with a child's mental illness and stress can find help in a crisis through JCCA's Mental Health and Preventive Services. The goal is to stabilize and support families to resolve immediate problems and keep children safe at home. Offers crisis intervention, rapid assessment, and treatment and works with the children's schools, family courts, and other community services. Serves the Highbridge and Mott Haven neighborhoods of the South Bronx (and several neighborhoods in Brooklyn).

### Contact Information

(718) 859-4500  
bpo@jccanyc.org  
JCCA Family Resource Center Warm  
Line: (347) 394-5186  
www.jccanyc.org

### Pelham Family Center (JBFCs)

This Northeast Bronx program aims to strengthen individual and family functioning and prevent abuse, neglect or removal of children from the home. The program offers individual, family, couple, and group treatment for families with children age 6 and up. Clinical work is combined with intensive advocacy, referrals and a mini-tutoring program. Program works with families involved in child welfare.

### Contact Information

2250 Holland Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10467  
(718) 798-7801  
Intake Coordinator: (844) 663-2255  
or (212) 584-8495

## Brooklyn:

### Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families: Steps to End Family Violence

Offers programs for adult survivors of domestic violence as well as individual and family therapy services for children. The Children's Therapy Program offers children ages 0-12 comprehensive trauma-based individual and family therapy. The parent or caregiver is also supported by the therapist with parent support sessions, groups, and advocacy services. Services are free, no insurance required.

### Contact Information

www.egscf.org/services/steps/  
Helpline: 877-783-7794

### Jewish Child Care Association

Families coping with a child's mental illness and stress can find help in a crisis through JCCA's Mental Health and Preventive Services. The goal is to stabilize and support families to resolve immediate problems and keep children safe at home. Offers crisis intervention, rapid assessment, and treatment and works with the children's schools, family courts, and other community services. Serves several Brooklyn neighborhoods (and the Highbridge and Mott Haven neighborhoods of the South Bronx). Referral required.

### Contact Information

858 East 29th Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11210  
(718) 859-4500  
bpo@jccanyc.org  
JCCA Family Resource Center Warm  
Line: (347) 394-5186

### The Marvin Kaylie Tikvah Center at OHEL

Offers mental health services, parent counseling, trauma and grief counseling, child and adolescent psychotherapy, family psychotherapy, and trauma services. Covered by Medicaid.

### Contact Information

2925A Kings Highway  
Brooklyn NY 11229  
(718) 382-0045

**Neptune Family Services/  
Southern Brooklyn Family  
Services (JBFCs)**

Preventive, community-based services offering counseling and advocacy to families with children at risk of abuse and neglect. Services include individual, group, and family therapy, as well as parenting groups and workshops. Program works with families involved in child welfare. Both office-based and in-home services available.

**Contact Information**

2233 Nostrand Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11210  
(718) 258-1714 x210 or x201 for intake  
Director: Tracy Phillips,  
tphillips@jbfc.org

**New York Center for Child  
Development Early Childhood  
Mental Health Treatment and  
Consultation Program**

This program provides caregiver-child treatment, both in the home and in the center, and relationship-based services to families with multiple stressors.

**Contact Information**

Bronx Office: 2336 Andrews Ave,  
2nd Floor  
Bronx, NY 10468  
(718) 561-5300  
Speak to Jasmine Fabian  
Email: info@nyccd.org

**SCO Family of Services  
Baby & Me**

Baby & Me developmental playgroups support nurturing attachments between parents and their young children that are important to healthy child development. Group facilitators use play and discussion to deepen parents' understanding of their child's development, build connections, and feel more confident as parents. Parents in groups also build support networks with one another. Open to families with young children in foster care with SCO only.

**Contact Information**

444 Thomas S. Boyland Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11233  
(718) 342-3111

69-71 Saratoga Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11233

(718) 443-4461  
sco.org/programs/early-childhood/

**Woodhull Medical Center:  
Video Intervention Project (VIP)**

The VIP Program at Woodhull Medical Center (and Bellevue in Manhattan) is a new support for parents with children ages 0-5 who are low-income patients at Bellevue and Woodhull Medical Centers. This approach builds children's brain development, language and social skills during children's doctor visits. Families enroll in the program through their primary care doctor, or through outreach specialists who enroll mothers who have just given birth at the hospital.

**Contact Information**

760 Broadway  
Brooklyn, New York 11206  
General Info: (718) 963-8000

**Manhattan:**

**ACS-NYU Children's Trauma  
Institute: Safe Mothers,  
Safe Children Program**

Safe Mothers, Safe Children is open to mothers enrolled in preventive programs citywide who meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder and have a child age 2 to 9. Since this program is a research study, there are specific requirements for enrollment. The program consists of 23 weekly sessions with a few additional assessment appointments. Case planner referral required. Free.

**Contact Information**

ACS-NYU Children Trauma Institute  
One Park Avenue, 8th Floor, Room  
8-220  
New York, NY 10016  
(646) 754-4819  
Email: rachel.tache@nyumc.org

**All Children's House Family  
Center at Echo Park, a program  
of the Association to Benefit  
Children (ABC)**

ABC's All Children's House promotes family resilience through Child-Parent Psychotherapy, an intense home- or office-based therapy that emphasizes parent-child attachment, nurturing and parent support. Program is for parents who have experienced trauma, with children up to 5. Services in English and Spanish.

**Contact Information**

1841 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10035  
(646) 459-6164

**Children of Bellevue: The Video  
Interaction Project (VIP)**

The VIP Program at Bellevue (and Woodhull Medical Center in Brooklyn) is a new support for parents with children ages 0-5 who are low-income patients at Bellevue and Woodhull Medical Centers. This approach builds children's brain development, language and social skills during their doctor visits. Families enroll in the program through their primary care doctor, or through outreach specialists who enroll mothers who have just given birth at the hospital.

**Contact Information**

462 First Avenue, ME-15  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 562-2455  
info@childrenofbellevue.org

**The Fostering Connection**

One-to-one match program offers long-term psychotherapy to foster-involved children, youth and families, with licensed psychotherapists in their private offices, at no cost. Therapists work with individuals or with families. TFC accepts referrals or families can call on their own.

**Contact Information**

121 Avenue of Americas, 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10013  
(516) 441-7817  
thefosteringconnection@gmail.com  
www.thefosteringconnectionnyc.org

**NY Presbyterian Family Peace  
Program**

The Family Peace Program focuses on domestic violence and works with the 'non-abusing' parent and the children together. The FPP includes:

**Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)**, a one-year intensive relationship-based trauma treatment for young children ages zero to six (0-6) and their non-abusing parent/caregiver; **Kids Club**, a 16-week group for children 7-12 exposed to domestic violence; and **Kids Club Parenting Group**, a group for parents of children in Kids Club that meets at the same time in order to help parents repair, strengthen and

improve parent-child relationships impacted by domestic violence. Referral required.

**Contact Information**

99 Ft. Washington Ave.  
New York, NY 10032  
Intake: (646) 317-5517

Referral forms available for download:  
nyp.org/services/  
acn\_family\_peace\_program.html  
Fax referral forms to (646) 317-5518

Program Manager: Cynthia Arreola,  
MSW, (646) 317-5516,  
cya9006@nyp.org

**St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital  
Parent-Infant Center at the Child  
and Family Institute**

The Parent-Infant Center (PIC) is a prevention and treatment program for parents/caretakers and children birth to 3, as well as pregnant women, with a history of physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, depression, isolation, or mental and physical health problems. It also supports families with children who are showing serious behavior problems or developmental delays. All families receive parent-child therapy. Additional services include parent-child therapy groups, individual therapy for parents and pregnant women, parenting skills, and medication services. Anger management can be incorporated into therapy, but there is no specific course. Sliding fee, with Medicaid accepted, and offered in English and Spanish.

**Contact Information**

1090 Amsterdam Ave, 17th floor  
New York, NY 10025  
(212) 523-3073  
Intake Coordinator: (212) 523-3082

Director: Wendie Klapper, Ph.D., (212) 523-3071, wklapper@chpnet.org

**University Settlement Butterflies  
Program**

Butterflies is for children under age 5 with social and emotional issues. Intensive therapy is provided to children and families. Services include individual, parent-child and group play therapy; workshops for parents, educators and community members; and intensive, long term, trauma-focused therapy. Services are free and

available in English, Cantonese and Mandarin.

**Contact Information**

184 Eldridge Street  
New York, NY 10002  
(212) 453-4534  
Email:  
butterflies@universitysettlement.org

Bonnie Cohen, Director of Clinical Services,  
(212) 453-4510,  
bonnie@universitysettlement.org  
www.universitysettlement.org

**Queens:**

**Child Center of New York  
Mother-Infant Socialization  
Groups at the Trude Weishaupt  
Center**

“Baby and Me” group for parents and children ages 0-5. Languages spoken: Bengali, Cantonese, English, Farsi, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Marathi, Portuguese, Spanish. Must be referred by ACS or Family Court, have an open preventive service case, or be open to receiving services to prevent abuse or neglect.

**Contact Information**

140-15B Sanford Avenue  
Flushing, NY 11355  
(718) 539-2500

Clinic Administrator: Nelly Marte,  
nellymarte@childcenterny.org

Child Center General Info:  
60-02 Queens Boulevard Lower  
Level

Woodside, NY 11377  
(718) 651-7770 x202

Email:  
meghanasawant@childcenterny.org  
www.childcenterny.org

**The Elly & Brochie Kleinman  
OHEL Regional Family Center**

Offers family counseling, trauma and grief counseling, child and adolescent psychotherapy, family psychotherapy, and more. Covered by Medicaid.

**Contact Information**

156 Beach 9th St.,  
Far Rockaway, NY 11691  
Tel: 1-(800) 603-OHEL

**Forestdale’s Attachment and  
Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC)  
Program**

Works with parents involved with Forestdale who are reunifying with babies between 6 and 24 months. The highly-structured, 10-week program meets parents and babies right in their homes. Supports parent-child attachment between parents and babies in foster care or returning home from foster care. Referral required.

**Contact Information**

67-35 112th Street  
Forest Hills, NY 11375  
(718) 263-0740

**Safe Space Family Resource  
Centers SEEN & HEARD  
Program**

Parents/caregivers and children ages 0-5 work with highly trained specialists who help families learn how to heal and express their feelings after witnessing or experiencing traumatic events. The program was developed using the evidence-based Child-Parent Psychotherapy model. Medicaid accepted.

**Contact Information**

Headquarters:  
89-74 162nd Street  
Jamaica, New York 11432  
(718) 526-2400

Far Rockaway Branch: 1600 Central Avenue

Far Rockaway, NY 11691  
(718) 471-6818

Liberty Branch (serving Richmond Hill, Ozone Park and Howard Beach)  
107-14 Liberty Avenue  
Ozone Park, NY 11417  
(718) 843-0493  
www.safespaceny.org/safespace/  
programs/Family\_Support/

**Staten Island:**

**Children’s Blended Case  
Management & Home and  
Community-Based Services  
Waiver Program (JBFCs)**

Offers care and support to emotionally disturbed children and adolescents (ages 5-18) who are heavy users of mental health services and at risk of needing institutional or hospital-level care. Family therapeutic services offered on an as-needed

basis. This program is covered by Medicaid.

**Contact Information**

2795 Richmond Avenue  
Staten Island, NY 10314  
(718) 982-6982

Directors: Renee Jones, LMSW (Administrative Supervisor of Children’s Blended Case Management); Dana Hilton, LMSW (Director of Home and Community-Based Services Waiver Program)

**Staten Island Family Services  
(JBFCs)**

Provides a range of services for teens (up to 18) and their families, including crisis intervention, assessment, individual, family and group treatment.

**Contact Information**

358 St. Marks Place, 4th-5th Floors  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
(718) 727-3303  
Director: Vicki Kriemelman, LCSW

**Staten Island Mental Health  
Society Outpatient Therapeutic  
Services**

Individual and family counseling serves children, teens and young adults up to age 21 with emotional/behavioral challenges. Diagnostic and treatment services in English, Spanish and several other languages. Individual, group, and family therapies, psycho-pharmacology, medication management, as well as parent counseling, are available to all registered clients and their families. All programs accept Medicaid. All services are based on a sliding scale and some are free.

**Contact Information**

Intake: (718) 442-2225  
Email: info@simhs.org  
simhs.org

**ABOUT Rise**

Rise trains parents to write about their experiences with the child welfare system in order to support parents and parent advocacy and to guide child welfare practitioners and policymakers in becoming more responsive to the families and communities they serve. Our print and online magazine provides peer support and information to parents and professionals. Subscribe at [www.risemagazine.org](http://www.risemagazine.org).

This project grew out of a series of public presentations by Rise writers about the impact of trauma on parenting. We wanted to provide a handout for parents, caseworkers, lawyers and judges about NYC programs that provide parent-child therapy. Soon we realized that no one had all of this information in one place.

Sarah Johnson, Rise’s intern from the Columbia University School of Social Work, pulled together

this resource list. Thank you Frank Wolf at Child Welfare Fund, Wanjiro Gethaiga at the Center for Family Representation, and staff of the programs listed here for your help.

If a relevant program has been left off this list, our sincere apologies. Please contact us so we can add the program information to the online version of this resource. Please also notify Rise of any changes in program contact information.

Contact Rise Director Nora McCarthy at [nora@risemagazine.org](mailto:nora@risemagazine.org) or (646) 543-7099 for information about Rise parent presenters, reprinting Rise stories or using Rise in your work.

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# Starting Strong

Parent-child therapy helps parents and children build a lasting bond.

BY ANTOINETTE ROBINSON WITH SONIA DIAZ

Wendie Klapper, director of the Parent-Infant Center at Mt. Sinai-St. Luke's, explains how therapy can help parents and very young children build a stronger relationship. Strengthening that bond early on, she says, can benefit children throughout their lives.

## Q: What is Child-Parent Psychotherapy?

**A:** Child-Parent Psychotherapy is therapy for parents and their young children, ages 0-5. The parent and child meet with the therapist together, and the therapy focuses on how the parent and child interact, think and feel about each other.

Parents and children spend one hour a week with a therapist focusing on their relationship through play. One of the main ways very young children express themselves is through play.

We ask parents to observe their child playing and imagine what the child is thinking or feeling. If a child is behaving in destructive ways, the therapist can help a parent learn new strategies to deal with a child's behavior. But the therapist also encourages the parent to empathize with the child. When children feel that their parents understand them and are curious about them, they feel less anxious and they grow calmer.

During the week, parents work on dealing with things like tantrums or bedtime routines. During the session, the parent and therapist talk about what works, what doesn't work, and they problem solve together. Therapists listen carefully to what parents say, because parents are the experts on their child. No one knows that child better.

## Q: How do you see families grow?

**A:** We have a young mother in our program now whose 1-year-old was



removed from her care. The mother was alleged to be verbally and emotionally abusive. As a child, she herself had been physically and sexually abused and spent time in foster care.

Through individual therapy, she made a lot of gains in understanding how her own trauma history impacted her relationship with her child. For example, she wasn't nurturing her child or being consistent, maybe because of how she was treated as a child. She and her individual therapist also developed strategies for her to calm herself down when she became very upset.

In Child-Parent Psychotherapy, she was able to focus on changing her relationship with her child. She understood better how her tone of voice and body language might feel threatening to her child. She also recognized that her child's severe temper tantrums might be a reaction to being placed in foster care.

As this mom became less angry and felt less helpless as a mother, she also began to play with a lot of enjoyment. Play became a wonderful experience she and her child shared. At the beginning, we weren't sure whether this mother would be able to reunite with her child, but her child is scheduled to return home soon.

## Q: What is the role of the



## therapist?

**A:** Very often, when families are under stress, that stress breaks down trust between parent and child and damages a child's sense of safety with the parent—what we call attachment. The goal of Child-Parent Psychotherapy is to strengthen that attachment and restore trust and feelings of safety.

Therapists also help parents discuss difficult topics with their children, even very young children. For instance, the therapist can help the parent find ways to answer, "Why don't I live with you, Mommy?" It's important for parents to reassure children that the problems the family is facing are not the child's fault.

We also talk about parents' own experiences with play. Many parents don't know how to play, because they weren't given the opportunity to play themselves as children. That can create a lot of anxiety. Therapists help parents develop age-appropriate activities to do with their children, and provide reading materials to help parents become experts on child-rearing. Parents also develop insight into how their own childhood impacts how they raise their children. That insight is very important to the parent-child relationship.

Many parents also go to individual

therapy. When parents have been through so much, individual therapy provides a really important opportunity to work through their own feelings.

## Q: Who can Child-Parent Psychotherapy help?

**A:** Child-Parent Psychotherapy was developed to help parents and children heal from the devastating impact of domestic violence. We also see families that have been impacted by physical or sexual abuse, neglect, the loss of a child, a child's placement in foster care, or mental health problems, like severe depression or post-traumatic stress. We can even work with mothers who are pregnant, and continue working with them after their child is born. The therapy usually lasts anywhere from several months to two years.

Parents also come to us who are struggling with their children's behavior. Some children may be born with sensory issues, like sensitivity to being touched, which makes it hard to comfort them. Other children may have speech delays, which makes it hard to communicate and leads them to act out. As parents understand more about what their children are trying to communicate by their behaviors, they can help children communicate in positive and effective ways.

We focus on the parent-child relationship at such a young age because we know from years of research that if parents and children are able to develop an emotionally supportive relationship early on, it helps both the child and parent continue to build a healthy relationship throughout the child's life. Having a safe and trusting relationship also leads to other positive outcomes for children, including improved school performance, positive relationships with peers, and decreased substance abuse.

ILLUSTRATION BY KAROLINA ZANIBENGO

# Seen and Heard

*I was able to listen to my son when I felt heard.*

BY PIAZADORA FOOTMAN

Most parents whose children enter foster care have to take parenting classes in order to get their children back. I went to two parenting classes that didn't help before I found a program that worked for me.

The ones that didn't help were the ones where the instructor read to us from a big parenting skills book or played old videos of moms trying to get their kids to listen. Then the instructor would say, "Ok, what did you learn?" or just, "Hey, use the skills you saw today in this video."

I'd sit there thinking that the strategies didn't apply to my son. The book would say to put your kid in a time out if he acted out, but when I tried time out with my son, it only made him angrier. When I told the instructor that, she just said, "Keep trying." I felt defeated, like a failure.

## No Mother-Son Respect

At the time, my 5-year-old son was living with my grandmother because I'd been arrested and then placed in a mental health facility for 18 months. By the time I moved back home, I'd overcome an addiction and was managing my bipolar disorder.

Xavier was about to come back home and I felt overwhelmed because we still didn't have that mother-son respect level. I wanted it to be that I spoke to my son once and he would listen, period, end of story. But Xavier was not listening the first, second or third time I told him to do something. I had to understand that that's not quite how kids are.

Eventually the court sent me to a different kind of parenting program, a parent-child therapy program in the Bronx called Chances for Children

that uses video to help parents see themselves. Each week, they took video of me playing with my son and then the therapist discussed it with me. At first I felt like, "Ugh, I don't want to be here. It'll just be a repeat of the last two classes." But it was different. With the video, I got to see the problems between my son and me from a different point of view.

## A New Perspective

During our video sessions, Ms. Martha would have Xavier and me play on the carpet with different toys. In the middle of the session, she'd

was frustrating Xavier by moving too fast from toy to toy. I kept changing the toys because I was bored with them instead of waiting for him to finish. This would make Xavier upset. He would try to get the same toy again.

I thought Xavier was too young to understand playing. I wanted to teach him how to follow instructions so he could play with his toys how they were meant to be played with. I didn't understand his way of playing, that it didn't matter if he followed the instructions if he was enjoying himself.

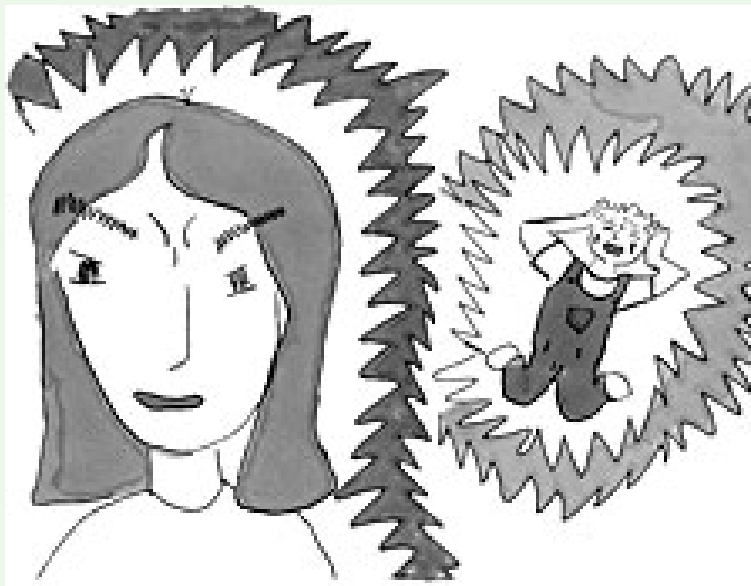


ILLUSTRATION: SAHAH AJIBAB

stop the tape to show me what she noticed. She said that it was good that I even wanted to play with my son, and that she could tell that we normally play with one another. She also noticed that when we were coloring, Xavier longed for my approval of his picture. Ms. Martha told me this meant Xavier cared about what I thought, which is a sign of a mother-child bond.

Ms. Martha also showed me how I

It was hard to watch the first day's video. When I saw myself pressure Xavier into playing with a new toy because I was tired of playing with the old one, I felt like I was being a bully, not a mom. But after that session, I felt amazed. Ms. Martha had already helped me understand why my son got frustrated when we played together; he was unable to finish tasks that he started. Martha told me it was OK if Xavier stayed on tasks a little longer than I preferred.

## Ideas That Worked

At first, when I tried to follow Ms. Martha's advice at home, it was a disaster: Xavier took so much time to play that he didn't want to stop to eat or take a bath or do anything that he wasn't ready to do! At our next session, I told Ms. Martha that I could not just simply let him play as long as he wanted. We had things to do besides play!

She told me about the egg timer approach. I would set the egg timer to go off 10 minutes before I wanted Xavier to do a different task. The countdown helped Xavier understand that playtime was almost over.

At home, the egg timer approach didn't work immediately, but eventually it worked so well that I just gave Xavier early warnings and we gave the egg timer a rest.

## Listening to Each Other

From our video parenting sessions, I learned that Xavier needed me to be more patient with him and to hear him out. I also felt like he began to understand that when I gave him warnings that it was time to stop playing, he had to listen.

The biggest change was in my thinking. When my grandmother raised me, she acted like children should have no say-so, no thoughts, no feelings and, point blank, no voice. When Xavier was young, I found myself inhabited by my grandmother's ghost. I treated Xavier the same way.

The video parenting helped me realize that kids have their own minds and have real feelings too. Now that I've acknowledged that children are human just like me, I can talk with them instead of demanding. When I first went to the video parenting, I just wanted to get Xavier to listen to me. From our experience, I learned that I needed to listen to him, too.

# There Is Always a Way Forward

*Therapy showed me I could build a better future for myself and my children.*

BY MICARLINE LAVENTURE

When I started attending the Safe Mothers, Safe Children program at the ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute, I felt like my past had completely destroyed me and my relationship with everyone

As a child, I used to have to look down when an adult was talking to me. If I looked up, then I would get hit. My family called it disrespect. But when I became an adult, I felt disrespected by everyone, including my children. I often felt so angry at them that they were afraid of me. At the same time, I would give in to them all the time. I didn't know how to be a parent.

As a child I was also violated so many times I can't even count. As an adult, I was so afraid that I wouldn't even sleep with my bedroom door open, even though I knew my kids were the only people in my house. I just didn't feel safe, even behind closed doors.

## Ashamed of My Story

When I started therapy, I was so ashamed to talk about anything that had to do with my life. But my therapist supported me. There were times that I didn't feel like talking to her about my past, but she helped me realized how good it would be to let it out, and I did.

She also gave me charts to fill out for homework that helped me monitor my feelings so I could pay attention to when I was feeling angry or confused. Those charts helped me pay more attention to how strong my feelings were, and learn ways to bring down the intensity.

## Learning to Play

I also began to play with my children. My therapist gave me logs to write down whether I had played with my children for even 5 minutes a day, and whether there were any obstacles.

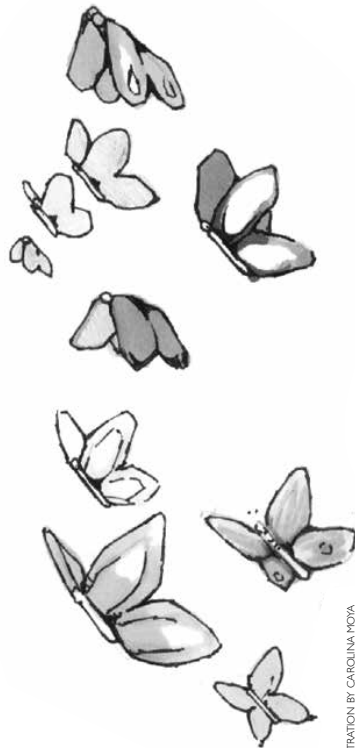


ILLUSTRATION BY CAROLINA POJA

At first I just took small steps. But as we played, I felt like I was learning how to play right along with them. I stopped being afraid to enjoy myself.

My younger children began to trust me more and more. My 6-year-old daughter used to be so afraid to

As I played with my children, I felt like I was learning to play right along with them. I stopped being afraid to enjoy myself.

come to me when I called her, and she would lie to me all the time. But she began to really open up. It felt wonderful when my 5-year-old son started telling me everything about his day when he came home from school.

## 'I Will Never Give Up on You'

It was much harder with my older daughter, who is 15. While I was in therapy, she overdosed. I was overwhelmed with so many feelings. One way I began to sort them out was by filling out a special chart. I wrote down how angry I was with my daughter, but also how helpless I felt, and how guilty that her overdosing had to do with me and the kind of mother I used to be.

I also wrote down my actions and the results of my actions. I realized that when I refused to take my daughter to the hospital because I was so angry, that made her think that I think I'm better off without her. That was painful to realize.

I also wrote down alternative actions I could take, like telling my daughter, "I understand why you did what you did. I'm here for you, and I will never give up on you." I wrote down other feelings I could have about myself as well, like being proud of not giving up on my daughter.

## Finding Ways Forward

In so many ways, therapy helped me take control of my life and believe that there is always a way forward. It helped me give my children some-

I have the right to feel and express my feelings, both positive and negative.

I have the right to make mistakes. I have the right to have my own opinions and convictions.

I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. I have the right to change my mind or decide on a different course of action.

I have the right to protest unfair treatment or criticism.

I have the right to expect honesty from others.

I have the right to my own values and standards.

I have the right to be angry at someone I love or anybody for that matter.

I have the right to say "I don't know" no matter what the question may be.

I have the right to negotiate for change.

I have the right to be in a non-abusive environment.

I have the right to ask for help or emotional support.

I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time, even if others want my company.

I have the right not to have to justify myself to others.

I have the right not to take responsibility for someone else's behavior, feelings, or problems.

I have the right not to have to anticipate others' needs and wishes.

I have the right not to always worry about the goodwill of others.

I have the right to choose not to respond to a situation.

I have the right to be respected and taken seriously.

I have the right to a happy life.

I have the right to my freedom.

When I completed the therapy program, I received a certificate. I call it my diploma. I told my therapist, "This program changed my life." But she said to me, "No, Micarline, you did it. And I'm proud of you."

thing my parents didn't give me—the safety, the trust, and most of all, the love I never received.

I also began to understand what my rights are as a human being. I learned that:

I have the right to ask for what I want. I have the right to say "no."