

SPRING 2018

Rise

INSIGHTS



'WHERE I COME FROM DOESN'T DETERMINE WHERE I WILL GO'

A GUIDE TO PARTNERING WITH PARENTS TO BREAK THE
CYCLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT

INSIGHTS MAKES THE POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHILD
WELFARE-AFFECTED PARENTS ACCESSIBLE TO PROFESSIONALS INVESTED IN REFORM

ABOUT RISE

Founded in 2005, Rise trains parents to write and speak about their experiences with the child welfare system in order to support parents and parent advocacy and to guide child welfare professionals in becoming more responsive to the families and communities they serve. Our goal is to reduce unnecessary family separations and increase the likelihood that children who are placed in foster care quickly and safely return home.

Rise runs writing workshops; publishes a magazine and other informational resources for parents; presents to professionals about parents' perspectives and recommendations for policy and practice change; partners with child welfare agencies to improve practice; and advocates for reform. Learn more at www.risemagazine.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This edition of INSIGHTS was compiled and edited by Rachel Blustain. Emily Shechtman, Sharkkarah Harrison, Nancy Fortunato and Dominique Arrington contributed to content development. Since 2012, "My Story, My Life" has been supported by the Child Welfare Fund, Viola W. Bernard Foundation, Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), Dammann Fund and Pinkerton Foundation. Writing workshops and focus groups have been held at the Albert Einstein Infant-Parent Court Project, Center for Family Representation, Brooklyn Family Defense Project, Inwood House, Lawyers for Children and at Rise itself. Writers in two workshops at Graham Windham also contributed to this project. Writers were referred by the Chicago Family Defense Center, the Child Welfare Organizing Project, and Safe Mothers, Safe Children program of the ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute at NYU Langone Medical Center. Rise has collaborated with ACS' Teen Specialist Unit to bring Know Your Rights trainings to expectant and parenting youth in foster care and to bring stories from this project into ACS' handbook for working with these youth. Thank you to Julie Peterson, Susan Chinitz, Lisa Primus and Charlyn Harper Browne for providing Rise feedback on this paper. The Center for the Study of Social Policy, especially, has been a partner throughout our work. Thank you to all of our generous partners on this project.

Thank you to all the many parents and foster care alumni who participated in Rise focus groups, interviews and roundtable discussions. Participants in My Story, My Life writing groups and other recent Rise writers who grew up in foster care or were raised by kin include: Tyesha Anderson, Dominique Arrington, Lamora Beary, Michael Blamo, Ashley Brewster, Laquana Chappelle, Rhonneil Cooper, Latisha Dupree, Latoya Fitzgerald, Tahitia Foggie, Piazadora Footman, Nancy Fortunato, Adisha Garner, Railei Girard, Jasmin Gonzalez, Erica Harrigan-Orr, Sharkkarah Harrison, Linda Harvey-Pearsall, Stephanie Haupt, Codee Jones, Mariya Kolesnichenko, Melissa Landrau, Alisha Maglio, Keyshana Mims, Rebecca Mohammed, Krystal Morales, Lashonda Murray, Desiree Navarro, Tyasia Nicholson, Kathy Rando, Lorenzo Ransom, Lindsay Reilly, Antoinette Robinson, Desiree Ruiz, Arielle Russell, Kira Santana, Raven Trotter, Sara Werner, Krystal Williams



“If you grew up in foster care, your mission when you have a baby is to never repeat that. You have this fantasy of how things are going to be. Then when you see your own children’s lives unravel the way yours did, you feel so helpless. My first daughter was the result of a rape and I entered foster care with her when I was 15. I always felt responsible for what was done to me, and I felt ashamed entering care. But I also felt like maybe somebody would finally see that I needed help.

“When there was no real help offered, I felt like there was nothing for me to do but numb my feelings with drugs. When I lost my children, my shame was overwhelming. I felt like I was destined to fail. When you grow up in foster care, you assume that everyone else grew up in perfect families. But successful people have struggles. Struggling isn’t proof that parents are failing. But it is their job to find the supports that can help them with those struggles.” – Danielle Goodwin

“Finding those supports can be very hard. I was taught to fear the system from the time I was young. My mother ran away from horrific domestic violence and she always told us, ‘You cannot talk about what is going on. If they know they will take you away and we will never see each other again.’

“The child welfare system came into my life three times. Each time I knew I needed help, but I believed I would be punished if anyone saw how much I was struggling. It was only when I was 28 and I had my last case that I learned: If you ever want to be free of the system, you have to begin to open up and build a support network. One way to do it is to take little risks, reveal little things to someone who seems safe. When nothing bad happens, you begin to say, ‘Hey, maybe I can trust this person.’” – Heather Cantamessa

“It’s also the system’s job to make it safe for parents to ask for help. They have to make sure parents are supported, not punished or shamed, for bringing a problem forward.” – Ambrosia Eberhardt

Danielle, Heather and Ambrosia are Veteran Parents in Washington State

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: 'WHERE I COME FROM DOESN'T DETERMINE WHERE I WILL GO'	5
The Damage Was Done: Will my family ever be safe from child welfare's reach?	6
Help in a Crisis: Stable housing and quality child care allowed me to work and focus on my son's needs	8
How Foster Parents and Staff Can Support the Parent-Child Bond	9
SUPPORTING EXPECTANT AND PARENTING YOUTH IN CARE	10
Dumbfounded: I had no idea fights with my baby's father could lead to a charge of neglect	11
Dads in the Picture: Addressing the issues that come between fathers and their children	13
Stepping into Fatherhood: I want to be a role model for my daughter.....	14
Family After Foster Care: I want my daughter to feel the love and security I finally found	15
Growing Into Motherhood: I needed to feel like the most important person to my son before I could let anyone else in.....	16
SPOTLIGHT: California Helps Young Parents Plan for Parenthood.....	17
'I Was Her Little Flower That Was Blossoming': Mentors and peers helped me find my way back to hope.....	18
RECOGNIZING TRAUMA AND OFFERING TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES	19
Trauma 101: What trauma is, how it can affect parents, and what helps.....	20
Signs of Stress Related to Trauma	21
What Is Parent-Child Therapy?	21
Everything Felt Like Nothing: I ran from my feelings and I didn't know how to stop.....	23
DEALING WITH SAFETY CONCERNS	24
Unsafe: Parents don't ask for help when they feel threatened.....	25
SPOTLIGHT: New York City Focuses on Reducing Removals	26
ACKNOWLEDGING AND ADDRESSING PAST FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCES AFTER REMOVAL	27
How Case Planners Can Build Trust Using Transparency.....	29
Joining the System: Parent advocates who have been both child and parent in the system are a powerful resource to improve it.....	30
ENGAGING PARENTS IN SYSTEM REFORM	31
'Luvya!': How I learned this new foreign language of motherhood	32
STORY INDEX	34



INTRODUCTION

'WHERE I COME FROM DOESN'T DETERMINE WHERE I WILL GO'

For many young people who grew up in foster care, becoming a parent is a transformational experience that motivates them to create the lives and families they've longed for. They remember the special moments of love in their own childhoods. They learn how to care for their children through a combination of sheer determination, watching others, taking classes, reading books and being taken under someone's wing. They double down on school and work. They succeed in giving their children stability and connection. As one young parent wrote:

"As a child in foster care, I was wild and out of control. I felt like I had no control over where I lived or when I had to pack my bag to leave, no control over foster parents introducing me as their foster child, no control over visitation with my mother. I thought taking control by acting out was the way.

"When I found out I was pregnant I knew instantly I had to make some major changes for my child. My daughter was not a product of the state. She was that light after a very long and dark journey giving me purpose to do things the right way. Having self-control was really just the beginning of gaining control over my entire life."

The right information at the right time can empower parents to become proactive in creating safety and stability for their families, rather than being trapped in reactivity to threats from the system.

Despite their efforts, though, too many young parents find themselves and their children sucked back into the system they were determined to escape. Their worst tragedy repeats itself. The implicit promise made by the child welfare system—to do better by them than it believed their parents could do—is broken. This promise is broken not just for an individual child, but across generations.

Between 2006 and 2012, 1 out of 3 young mothers in foster care in New York City had their own children removed from their custody before they'd ever left the system, according to data analyzed by New York City's Administration for Children's Services. (NYC has

begun to bring down those numbers—see page 26.) High removal rates continue after young parents leave foster care. Data kept by some providers suggest that as many as 25%- 40% of mothers under 25 whose children enter foster care in New York City were themselves in foster care in childhood.

'MY STORY, MY LIFE'

Since 2012, Rise's special project for young parents who grew up in foster care—called "My Story, My Life"—has trained more than 40

parents in their teens, 20s and early 30s to write and speak about their experiences and advocate for change. Rise offered a multistep process to build young parents' voice and power:

- Through writing groups, young mothers reflected on their experiences, met peers and older mothers who had achieved in life despite similar hardships, focused on their own and their children's needs, set goals for their futures and produced publication-quality personal essays;
- Through focus groups with parents, interviews with professionals working in the system and conversations with parenting youth and former foster youth around the country, we came to more deeply understand the lived experiences of parents in and who grew up in foster care;
- Through collaborations with nearly a dozen foster care, legal, mental health, policy and advocacy organizations, Rise created meaningful opportunities to bring the voices of young parents into child welfare system reform.

In stories bravely shared, parents described having big dreams for their families but keeping themselves far from the people and programs that might support them in reaching those dreams. They feared that if they revealed their secret struggles—with complex trauma, poverty, isolation, as well as the growing pains that all parents experience—professionals would only judge them and, ultimately, destroy their families. Yet they also described finding pathways out of hiding. Sometimes with the help of professionals, other times despite them, many of these parents found pathways to hope for their families.

In these pages, they offer their insights for child welfare professionals and policymakers. We hope their words can guide professionals hoping to work more effectively with these young parents and to create systems that will work for them.

In addition to concrete recommendations, we hope this paper offers an intimacy and depth of understanding that grows out of Rise's many years of learning from and working with parents. We hope you come

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Parents whose histories are known to child protective investigators can find that small mistakes and traumatic reactions become the basis of removal. Here, Stephanie describes how her first child was removed.

The Damage Was Done Will my family ever be safe from child welfare's reach?

By Stephanie Haupt

I became pregnant at 18. I was living in Champaign, Illinois. I was a runaway from a transitional living placement and had met the man of my dreams.

We were so happy to become parents. Still, I worried. I knew the system has a way of grabbing you and ruining your life before you can understand what's happening.

When Vincent was born, he didn't have a sucking reflex and was in the NICU for 28 days. My boyfriend and I spent every day at the hospital. Sometimes I would sleep there, waiting for visiting hours to start.



One day when I was holding my son, my cell phone went off in my pocket. I silenced it by turning it off through my jeans. The nurse told me to wash my hands.

"Just a moment," I told her.

She demanded, "No, now."

As I attempted to get up, still recovering from surgery, she walked over and wrapped her hands around my son's torso and began to lift him up without a word to me—and without attempting to support his head. I panicked.

I reacted by tightening my hold on my son and kicking the nurse hard. Later I came to think that my experiences in residential care with uncaring staff influenced my reaction. When I saw that nurse not hearing me, I think my mind snapped to thinking I couldn't stop her with words.

But the damage was done.

The next day, my boyfriend and I met with child protective services.

away with a holistic vision of working with these parents that is guided by greater insight into young parents' often unspoken experiences.

FROM SCRUTINY TO SUPPORT

In part, young mothers who grew up in foster care suffer high rates of investigation and removals because of the same painful legacies carried by so many foster youth. Teen girls in foster care are much more likely than peers outside of foster care to become mothers at a young age; to be diagnosed with PTSD; to have a second child soon after the first; and to become homeless after leaving care. They are less likely than youth outside of foster care to have strong family relationships to rely on, and they are highly unlikely to voluntarily enroll in mental health and parenting support services.

Too often, though, living in foster care is in and of itself a risk factor. Young parents in foster care interact day and night with mandated reporters. Living in group homes and foster homes, and interacting with caseworkers, these parents are frequently threatened with their child's removal. They may have no one committed to keeping their child in their custody, despite rough times. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the American Bar Association's Center for Children and the Law, 77% of responding lawyers said they believed young mothers in foster care are separated from their children for less serious allegations than other mothers. As one parent explained:

"The other day I had a fight with my baby's father. My baby was not in the room, but when my caseworker found out, she said to me: 'Your actions make me question whether you're fit to be a mother.' I started feeling very depressed, very anxious and jumpy. I told my caseworker

I was thinking of going on medication. Again she questioned whether I was fit to be a mother. I don't think it's fair to be treated like that when I'm asking for help."

Even after parents age out of the system, they are "known" by the system in ways that other parents are not. Case files from the years parents spent in foster care as children include family histories, mental health diagnoses and psychiatric placements that can be automatically called up during a child protective investigation. (For other parents, records can only become part of the case if a parent consents or the court issues a subpoena.) Past diagnoses can become the basis of a neglect charge if a parent is not in treatment, even if the diagnoses were made years ago. Family histories that suggest a pattern of dysfunction can also influence perceptions of a parent, which can lead systems to respond more aggressively to parents they were once responsible for protecting.

Child welfare leadership and family courts must address the over-surveillance of these young parents and invest in "two-generation" solutions that protect young parents and their children.

PATHWAYS TO HOPE

Throughout this project, Rise has collaborated with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which conducts research and provides technical

assistance and guidance to child welfare systems. It has focused on system changes that can better support expectant and parenting youth in foster care.

CSSP's resources have outlined many reforms that can contribute to breaking a multi-generation cycle of family separation. These include:

- Sustained efforts to help youth in foster care prevent unwanted pregnancies, particularly approaches that address past histories of sexual abuse;
- Increased use of peer support for parents who may find it challenging to build relationships with adults, especially those who hold power over their lives;
- Greater availability of trauma-informed services for young adults and for parents and children together;
- Material supports for youth leaving care, including quality child care;
- Systematic approaches to reduce the over-reporting of young parents in foster care;
- Training for staff to reduce the stigma youth who spent time in care face when they return to the system as respondent parents.

CSSP noted in an early report: "Given that so little is known about the challenges these particular youth face and the ability of the system to respond to their needs, a qualitative assessment can help augment quantitative information that the agency collects and shed light on the story behind the data."

Young people who have grown up in foster care deserve every chance to provide the safety, stability and nurturance to their children that they may not have received themselves.

This publication illuminates the stories behind the data. It complements CSSP's body of work by focusing on how professionals can build relationships with young parents who grew up in foster care, provide information that can help these parents make

decisions about their own lives, help parents connect to sources of support of their own choosing and build a system where it is much safer for parents to reach out for help.

TRUST, INFORMATION, CHOICE, SAFETY

Fundamental to making any structural reforms effective is the capacity of professionals—from the front lines to leadership—to build trust with a group of parents who have profound, long-standing and very good reasons not to trust the child welfare system, "services," or, sometimes, anyone. Our writers' experiences suggest that trust can grow when professionals better understand young parents' overwhelming desire to provide their children better childhoods than they were given; have insight into behaviors, driven by trauma, that on their face seem self-destructive or insensitive to the needs of children; and recognize that parents who have spent their lives at the system's mercy need their autonomy respected, even when they may also need help. This paper offers recommendations and stories to illustrate how professionals at every level can build that trust.

This paper also stresses the need to provide information that can help parents make decisions about their own lives. The right information at the right time can empower parents to become proactive in creating safety and stability for their families, rather than being trapped in reactivity to threats from the system, or to feelings of hopelessness, pow-

erlessness, distrust and shame that may have built up over a lifetime. The stories of parents who explain the tools that helped them go from reactive to proactive are offered throughout this paper. These stories can be frontline workers' best allies in engaging parents in believing that change is possible.

Parents in this project consistently emphasized the need for professionals to help parents connect to sources of support of their own choosing. That includes support outside the system, support from peers and support from their own biological families. Many young parents in care do connect to professionals within the system who become their lifelines. But those relationships often end when professionals move on to other jobs, or when parents leave foster care. Other times, young parents' relationships to the child welfare system are too fraught to want to seek help within it. This paper highlights how child welfare professionals can think broadly and creatively about the critical task of helping parents build their support network, both before they leave the system and if they return to it as respondent parents.

STRATEGIES—AND URGENCY

Across the country, there is a growing recognition that child welfare systems have a responsibility to better support these parents and their children. For the first time, starting in 2020, the federal government will require states to report how many expectant and parenting youth are

wards of the state, and whether those parents and their children are housed together or apart. We would like to see the federal government go further and require that states count how many of all respondent parents, of any age, were once children in foster care. Knowing those numbers can add to the urgency for reform.

For frontline workers who feel responsible both for supporting young parents and protecting those children's children, we hope this paper offers strategies for breaking the cycle of foster care placement one family at a time.

For agency leadership responsible for creating a culture of safety and training staff to partner with parents, we hope the paper makes clear the critical importance of providing frontline staff with knowledge of complex trauma, engagement tools, as well as information about effective service referrals. Parents who have experienced high rates of childhood trauma are unusually reluctant to engage in services, often because services have failed them in the past. Sending parents to services that fail them again has the potential to trap professionals, parents and their children in distrust, anger and hopelessness.

For system leaders, the courts and policymakers, we hope this paper drives home just how important it is to inform parents every step of the

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

It's hard for parents to focus on their children's emotional needs when they're worried about basic issues of survival. Jasmin highlights the importance of connecting parents to housing and child care, especially before they leave the system.

Help in a Crisis Stable housing and quality child care allowed me to work and focus on my son's needs

By JASMIN GONZALEZ

My son was 2 when I aged out of foster care. Soon I was going to college full time, working 40 hours a week and paying my own child care. Things were easier when I had the group home staff to help. Once I left care, I had nothing. If I failed, I'd be screwed. And to the shelter we'd go.

I wanted to prove that, just because I grew up in care, there wasn't anything wrong with me. I wanted to complete college in four years and then find a rewarding job. I didn't want having a child young to stop me.

But because of my busy schedule, I barely saw my son. Monday through Thursday, I would take my son to daycare, then go to school and work. On Thursday evenings I'd drop him

at his father's for the weekend and then go back to work. I was always super tired and backed up with housework so I often ignored him even when we were together.

CONCRETE HELP

Then the cost of his daycare increased and I could no longer afford it. I quit school, and for five months took care of my son during the week and only worked weekends.

During that time, I felt panicked that we'd wind up in the shelter like many other foster youth. I also filled out the food stamp form incompletely and was left without food for two months. I had to ask a manager at work to let me take food home for free.

Finally one day I melted down and went running to my public housing office, shaking, and exploded in tears. The woman there let me cry. Then, based on my current pay stubs, she adjusted my rent down \$200 a month so I wouldn't be evicted. She also connected me to a social worker who helped me find a daycare where my son could go for free.

HELP FOR MY SON

The daycare was great, with small classes and nice teachers. Soon, I was able to pick up more work and I even had time to join a gym. Having stable housing and a good school for my son helped me feel calm enough to really focus on my son's needs. In the next few years, I worked less to spend more time with him. Unfortunately, I had to put college on hold. But it was worth it to see my son blossom.

way and show parents that child welfare systems truly believe in their ability to build safe families.

Avoiding removals, and reunifying families after removal whenever possible, is both in the best interest of the child and a matter of social justice. As ALIA CEO Amelia Franck Meyer stated in Rise's first issue on this topic: "Having your child removed when you've been in care means the worst thing that happened to you is now happening again. It can take superhuman strength to recover from that. When moms don't get the support they need to heal, what makes us think we won't be in the same spot when that child becomes a parent? We know more than ever how to break that cycle. We just have to start doing it."

System leaders can also respect the community of parents who grew up in care by acknowledging the special knowledge that they alone can contribute—as child welfare-affected children and as child welfare-affected parents. By engaging these parents as experts, systems can find better ways to break the intergenerational cycle of foster care placement.

HARD-WON INSIGHTS, MUCH-NEEDED CHANGE

This paper is organized according to the timeline of when child welfare professionals come in contact with parents, from the time young people in care are first expecting to addressing issues when challenges arise to

supporting reunification after removal. We hope this structure allows professionals to turn to parents' insights to guide every facet of their work.

Many of the parents who contributed to this paper have said that, in their teens and early 20s, they didn't believe they needed any help raising their children. Others were too burdened by shame to ask for help. All had good reason to fear that, if they exposed their struggles, they risked being separated from their children, just as they'd been separated from their own parents. It was only later that they realized that all parents need support. Despite a minefield of danger and shame, many found ways, by trial and error, to get it safely, whether through the child welfare system or outside of it. Their hard-won insights can guide much-needed change.

Young people who have grown up in foster care deserve every chance to provide the safety, stability and nurturance to their children that they may not have received themselves, so that their children can thrive and so that a devastating cycle of foster care placement can come to an end.

-- Rachel Blustain, My Story, My Life Project Director

How Foster Parents and Staff Can Support the Parent-Child Bond

It can be hard for foster parents and staff to balance ensuring that a baby is well cared without taking over the parenting role and sidelining the young parent. Here, Martha Edwards, the director of the Ackerman Institute's Center for the Developing Child and Family in New York, explains how foster parents and staff can help young parents gain confidence and build the connection with their child:

After a baby is born, staff and foster parents sometimes look at moms struggling and find it easier to just take over. That's understandable because these adults may be more experienced as parents. But when that happens, mothers can wind up feeling less confident and less connected to their babies.

In our trainings, we encourage staff and foster parents to provide moms just enough help but not more. We also encourage them to think of their jobs as connecting with the mother, not with the baby.

We introduce the concept of "parallel process," which means that staff and foster parents provide the same kind of support to young mothers that they'd like to see mothers give their babies. Staff and foster parents often say moms should be more responsive to their babies, or try harder to

understand their feelings. We ask them: "What are you doing to read that mom's cues and respond to her? What are you doing to learn what that mom is feeling?"

One foster mother told us, "The teen mom in my home is up all night on the phone. Then she has a hard time getting up for her child." We helped her become curious about that, and start a conversation. In the conversation, the mom was able to explain that the middle of the night was a scary time when she used to wait for the person who sexually abused her. Going to sleep was the last thing she wanted to do. That understanding helped the foster mother be a lot more supportive and a lot less judgmental. Once mothers in foster care have support, they're better able to focus on the relationship with their babies.

When staff and foster parents have safety concerns, that's another opportunity to collaborate. We coach them to say very directly to the mom: "Here's what I'm worried about. What can we do?"

If they decide they have to make a report, we advocate that they let the mom know exactly what they are going to report, have her sit with them while they make the report, and let the person receiving the report know they have discussed it with the mom. That can help preserve the relationship even through a very difficult process.



RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPORTING EXPECTANT AND PARENTING YOUTH IN CARE

Young parents in Rise’s writing groups shared many different feelings about becoming parents. Some were excited to create the families they’d always wanted. Others felt scared—and heard things that made them more fearful, like: “You’re not a good role model,” “Now you’ll have to go to a group home,” and, “Why don’t you give up your baby? Don’t you want a better life for this baby than you had?”

Over time, many came to see becoming parents as an opportunity to turn over a new leaf, prove people wrong and not repeat the cycle. They had dreams for their families. Often they needed help planning out the steps to reach those dreams. At the same time, they needed to feel independent and respected. Most of all, they needed to feel like the most important person in their children’s lives. Very often, they felt caught in power struggles, with professionals being quick to step in and take over.

Over the years, we also learned how hopeless parents who grew up in care can feel when they find themselves struggling. It was so important for them to hear that it’s normal for all parents to struggle.

As writer Piazadora Footman explained: “I went to lots of parenting classes that just made me feel like giving up. What I finally learned was to keep trying different approaches and keep finding different ways of getting help. I used to be afraid to be a parent. I’ve had to reset my mind so that I’m no longer afraid.”

Here is guidance on the information and approaches that can make a difference for young parents still in foster care:

EXPLAIN OUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PROVIDE A TRAINING FOR NEW PARENTS ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Perhaps the most important message that parents in care need to hear is: “Your children are not in care. You have custody of your children, not the child welfare system.”

USE PEER EDUCATION TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

Youth are far more likely to listen to their peers. Train peer educators to offer legal rights information and guidance on how to address challenges to prevent an investigation.

EXPLAIN THE CHOICES WE CAN MAKE FOR OUR CHILD

We need to know that we have the right to make important choices for our child—about our child’s medical care, education and more. We also have the right to decide who our child spends time with, as long as our children are safe.

CLARIFY OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN FOSTER HOMES OR GROUP HOMES

Many parents in foster care are reported because they left their child

“unattended” in a foster home or group home. Because foster parents sometimes watch parents’ children, and because agencies and foster parents also have legal responsibility to ensure that children are safe, conflict around childcare can arise. Communicate clearly that we have the responsibility to have a plan for our child at all times—for example, when we want to go out at night with friends. If agency policies conflict in any way with a parent’s decision-making, parents should know about them.

EXPLAIN OUR FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR CHILD

When youth in foster homes have babies, their foster parents are given extra money to pay for the baby’s needs. Sometimes foster parents also choose to give part of that money to parents so they can purchase items for their babies themselves. Tension over finances between young parents and foster parents can be reduced if caseworkers help foster parents clarify how money for the baby will be spent, and how much money, if any, the foster parent will provide to the parent to meet the baby’s needs herself.

EXPLAIN HOW WE’LL BE EXPECTED TO ADDRESS CONFLICT

Another common reason for reports against parents in foster care is that they’re fighting with adults or peers. Let us know that we can be reported for neglect if conflicts become violent, especially if our children are present. Provide information on how we are expected to

mediate or resolve conflicts. If we know what’s at stake, we are less likely to allow conflicts to escalate.

ENSURE WE KNOW WHAT KINDS OF ACTIONS MIGHT LEAD TO AN INVESTIGATION

Professionals sometimes don’t want to talk about what might lead to an investigation for fear of sounding negative or threatening. But it’s important for us to know what a mandated reporter is required to report. Many of us don’t realize that we’ll be vulnerable to charges of neglect because of substance use, even marijuana; relationship violence, especially if our baby is present; and failure to be in compliance with mental health mandates, like therapy or medication, even if we don’t agree with the diagnosis. You can help us by providing information how we will be expected to address these concerns.

ENSURE WE KNOW OUR LEGAL RIGHTS DURING AN INVESTIGATION

Many parents do not understand mandated reporting laws, whether they have to cooperate with investigators, what it means for a child protection case to be founded or unfounded, the difference between an investigation and a Family Court case, or the role that services can play in supporting families and helping parents prevent the filing of a neglect or abuse petition. If we are under investigation, make sure we are clear on what to expect and what steps we can take to help ourselves.

PARENT’S PERSPECTIVE

Parents in care or who grew up in care often describe being surprised when a case of neglect is called in on them. If they are loving parents and providing for their child’s physical needs, they may not understand how they can be charged with neglect for things like smoking marijuana, staying out past curfew, or fighting with their baby’s father. Here one parent describes the importance of making sure parents know what actions might lead to an investigation.

Dumbfounded I had no idea fights with my baby’s father could lead to a charge of neglect

BY ANONYMOUS

When I found out I was going to be a mom, I was scared. But I also looked at motherhood as something empowering and a great blessing.

Around the same time, I was approved for a transfer to an apartment in a new neighborhood. I felt like this was my fresh start.

But as it turned out, for most of my pregnancy I felt very alone. I was far from family and friends, with little money to prepare

for my baby. That made me too dependent on the baby’s father, with whom I had a difficult relationship.

One day we got into a fight in the street. When he hit me, the police were called, and they called ACS. When I found out they were investigating me for neglect, I was dumbfounded. I didn’t see any connection between my child’s father attacking me and me being neglectful. I thought neglect meant parents who don’t care for their kids or let them go hungry, and that wasn’t me at all.

I felt like they weren’t trying to hear anything I had to say and I was scared that they were going to take my child. I felt even worse because I’d been in foster care as a teen so I knew how it felt to be judged and scrutinized with no one there to catch me. I felt like I was going backward, which was something I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Ultimately, I was found not to have neglected my daughter and was sent to court-ordered preventive services, which actually really helped me. Over time my attitude changed from feeling like a victim to asking myself: How can I benefit from this?

But I wish I had understood before I ever had a case not to take my fights with my daughter’s father casually, and I wish I’d had more information about the system so I didn’t feel so confused and helpless.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

LISTEN TO WHAT WE THINK WE NEED

When we're expecting, it's important to help us plan out the basics: where we'll live, who'll support us, how we'll balance school, work and parenting. But when it comes to planning support services, professionals can recognize that many of us have had services our whole lives that haven't helped and may even have hurt or felt like an invasion of our privacy. The more you can ask us what kinds of support we think would help our families—and give us choices—the more likely we are to take them.

PROTECT OUR TIME TO BOND

It makes sense that we feel pressure to work and finish school, but we also need time to bond with our kids. Help us make a plan that balances bonding and practical goals. As one parent explained:

“When you're a parent in care, you have a family to take care of, you have school to attend, job interviews, workshops and parenting classes that are mandatory that they want you to complete on their time when you don't have time at all. But when our kids see us angry or annoyed they tend to get very cranky. Then that starts to build emotions between the both of us. That's when you have to brake.”

PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES THAT OTHER PARENTS HAVE FOUND HELPFUL

Ask parents what supports they've found helpful, and refer others to those services. Parents at Rise frequently recommend the following:

Home Visiting: Nurse-Family Partnership and other home visiting programs have been shown to support young parents and reduce abuse and neglect. Plus home visiting is convenient for new parents, who are often stressed out and exhausted. As one writer explained: “My visiting nurse made sure my son and I were healthy, gave me practical advice and spoke to me as a friend. She would even watch my son for me while I showered. At the time I felt drained and exhausted. Turning on the hot water, I'd stand in the steam falling asleep. Just having that time to myself made a big difference.”

Trauma-Focused Therapy: Therapy for youth in foster care often fails because our symptoms reflect trauma, not ADHD, bipolar, or other common diagnoses. For many of us, trauma-focused therapy has been different. It has helped us make sense of our lives and why our emotions can sometimes be so strong. It's helped us find ways to calm down those emotions when they get triggered. It has helped us see ourselves as survivors, not as victims or perpetrators, and take control of our lives.

Parent-Child Therapy / Video Therapy: Many of us have found that learning to be a parent works better when we are learning alongside our children. That's why we recommend parent-child therapy, also called “dyadic therapy,” where a therapist works with a parent and child together. (See p. X for more information.)

OFFER SERVICES OUTSIDE THE AGENCY

Agencies often have on-site therapists, and some group homes even offer parenting classes and parent-child therapy, which can be very convenient. But some parents don't feel comfortable opening up to agency therapists or other services. As one parent explained: “I've been in foster care since I was 3 years old but I've never run to my agency to tell them anything. When I do need something, I see a doctor, therapist, or psychiatrist outside the system. Why? I don't want anything I say to be used against me.”

Ask us what we prefer. And keep in mind that we may not be able to keep agency-based services once we leave the system, while we can keep seeing service providers in our communities.

BE SENSITIVE ABOUT STIGMA

We can feel frightened and sad if our children need to be evaluated for special needs. Having grown up with stigma, the last thing we want is for our children to be stigmatized, too. Plus, we've often been through mental health treatment and school challenges that have been painful.

We don't want our children to feel the same way.

If you talk to us about having our child evaluated or receiving services, let us know what we can do if we don't agree with an evaluation or we don't like the services.

Whenever you can, connect us to other parents who have gotten help for their children's special needs. Hearing from other parents can help us believe that services can give our children the best shot at achieving their dreams.

INFORM US ABOUT HOW TO ACCESS HELP IN THE FUTURE

When we are aging out, many of us want to get away from systems and services altogether. But once we're out, we often discover how much harder it is to raise our children than when we were in care. Provide a list of resources in our communities—including food pantries, rental assistance or other housing programs, community centers, libraries, youth programs and counseling—or help us develop our own list. That way, we know where to go when we're ready.

DON'T FORGET JOY

High-quality, low-cost programs where kids can play a sport, take a lesson, or learn a new skill don't just help kids—they help parents feel proud of their family lives. It's great to see our kids having fun. Their joy can help us feel joy, too. As parent Tyasia Nicholson said: “When I started going to support group, I didn't trust opening up to the other moms. But when I saw my son making friends, that helped me. Sometimes our kids teach us that if they can trust, we can too.”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

PROVIDE PEER SUPPORT

Being in foster care makes us feel like we've already lost our childhoods. That loss is even stronger once we become parents because it's so much harder to socialize with friends. Isolation adds to our feelings of shame. It means a lot to us to have the chance to socialize with other

When we are aging out, provide a list of resources in our communities. That way, we know where to go when we're ready.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Dads in the Picture

Addressing the issues that come between fathers and their children

BY PIAZADORA FOOTMAN

In my five years of dealing with my daughter's father, he only put his hands on me once. For three months he had been out of work. I noticed him becoming more snappy and less excited about going out to eat, which we did every week-end night. That didn't stop me from putting the pressure on him. One night he exploded and even started choking me. I stabbed him with a pen. He called the police. I left.

The next morning he came knocking at my door, asking forgiveness. A week later, I watched him cry for the first time. I held him and asked, "What's wrong?" I had to realize that his pride was hurt because he could no longer provide a lavish life for my children and me. He felt worthless. When I understood the pressure he felt, I began to get the foods we liked from the fish market and mix him a piña colada at home, and I did my own hair and stopped getting my nails done.

Do all men feel this kind of pressure? To find out, I spoke with Tim Nelson, a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who collaborated on the book *Doing the Best I Can* with his wife, Kathryn Edin. They interviewed fathers in Camden, New Jersey, one of the poorest cities in the country.

Q: WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO WRITE ABOUT FATHERS?

A: My wife and her colleagues wrote a book about the struggles of low-income unmarried mothers in Philadelphia and Camden. After the book came out, they were often asked, "What about the fathers? What is their involvement in children's lives?"

One stereotype is that these guys are just after sex, and when the girl comes up pregnant, they're out of there. So we were surprised that, by and large, these guys really were excited to become fathers. Many fathers had dropped out of school, didn't have a job, and some were using or dealing drugs. But a lot of them saw their child as their reason to get things together.

Q: WHAT CHALLENGES DID THEY FACE?

A: When you look at statistics, you see that by a child's fifth birthday, only half of fathers are still involved—living with their children or seeing them several times a week. A lot of it has to do with the reality that these men were not as successful as they wanted to be in turning their lives around.

Many embraced the "new fatherhood," which is about fathers having an emotional connection to their children: reading to them, playing, showing love and being there. But so much of men's identities revolve around work. At the end of the day, if they didn't even have money to take the kids to McDonald's, they didn't go around because they felt they had nothing to give.

Some men would get involved with dealing when they couldn't make ends meet, and that often led to using. Men who are actively using often keep themselves separate

from their children. They don't want their kids to see them in a degraded state. We need to be asking, "How can we work with guys in treatment to make contact with their kids and stay involved?"

We also saw that before the pregnancy, relationships were often very informal. The guy was seeing other women, or they'd only been together a short time. Then they tried to get it together for the sake of the baby. But after the baby came, the stress and tension would often lead to blowouts—substance abuse, infidelity, violence and so on. We really saw the fall off in fathers' involvement when both parents found new romantic attachments.

Q: WHAT COULD HELP LOW-INCOME FATHERS STAY IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES?

A: We asked, "If you had something to say to the government about how to make life easier for men in your situation, what would you tell them?" Child support was the main one. Many states have very harsh child support laws. They wanted to find a way for child support to be more flexible.

Fathers' relationships with their children and children's mothers also might not break down as much if these parents had more support around how to communicate and cope when they disagreed. Some programs have shown that they can help with these relational skills. Having intermediaries who can help a father stayed involved with his child after a breakup without having to deal with the bitterness of seeing the mother all the time also helps. We wanted to show that men really do want to be connected to their kids. We need to figure out how to partner with fathers so they can overcome the barriers.

young parents and have fun with our kids and other young families. And hearing about the struggles other young parents face can help us feel like we're not alone.

EDUCATE FOSTER PARENTS AND STAFF ABOUT HOW THEY CAN PROTECT OUR BONDS WITH OUR BABIES

After a baby is born, staff and foster parents sometimes look at moms struggling and find it easier to just take over. That's understandable. But when it happens, we feel less and less important to our children. Guide foster parents and staff to understand that helping us feel understood and supported can make it easier for us to understand and support our babies.

(See page 9 for more about supporting that "parallel process.")

SUPPORT OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY

Our families have child protective histories, and some have criminal histories, which can make foster care agencies worried about their involvement. However, these relationships are important to many of us. Sometimes our family members have also made great changes in their

lives, and could truly be our best sources of support for raising our children. If an agency has concerns about a family member who we want to keep in our lives, we hope the agency will do everything possible to get to know the person, assess them on a case-by-case basis and give our family members an opportunity to address concerns.

Siblings are especially important, and too often we are separated from them when we give birth because we can't stay in the foster home we've been living in with them. If we must be separated from our siblings, visits are essential.

SUPPORT CO-PARENTING

Fathers are often kept out of their children's lives. Sometimes it's because we have conflicts or relationship

violence. Fathers also stay away because they're not ready for the responsibility or think that we don't have anything to offer, especially if we're not working. Too often, though, child welfare systems just don't plan to include fathers.

Research shows that children do better and are less likely to enter foster care when their fathers are a part of their lives. Include us in

Being in foster care makes us feel like we've already lost our childhoods. That loss is even stronger once we become parents. It means a lot to us to have the chance to have fun with our kids and other young families.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Couples where one or both parents are in foster care usually don't have the option to live together, and parents in our groups described being discouraged from keeping their babies' fathers involved. Here, Michael shares how he and his girlfriend raised their baby as a team.

Stepping into Fatherhood

I want to be a role model for my daughter

BY MICHAEL ORR

On July 1, 2007, I held my daughter in my arms for the first time. Emma Frost (the nickname I gave her) was 6 pounds and 9 ounces with a head full of hair.

I couldn't feel a thing until I left the hospital. As I sat in the cab, looking out the window, I thought about good memories I had of my dad, how he always talked to me and showed me how to look out for trouble and avoid it.

My dad mostly raised me when I was a child and we were close even when I was in foster care. I pictured myself in my dad's place and Emma in my place. I could see myself helping her grow like my dad did with me.

BEING THERE FOR MY BABY

Since my girlfriend and I brought Emma home from the hospital, I've been proud to witness our baby growing up. Just seeing her coo, grab her feet and sit up is a joy.

Of course, some things have been difficult. At first I was dead tired due to her heavy overnight crying. Now she sleeps through the night and it's much easier for me to keep up with my energetic girl. Not many dads are around for their kids. I am making it a priority to be there for my baby.

THE COURAGE TO GROW

My girlfriend and I are raising our baby as a team. We're attending couples therapy and, whatever problems we have, we battle it out there.

My relationship with my dad is getting stronger, too. He rocks Emma in such a lovely way. It braces my spirits to see them together.

I hope that Emma can look to me as a role model as she grows up. Maybe she will find a genuine guy like her father when she gets of age to start dating. That's what I hope for my daughter.

Reprinted from Represent, a magazine by and for youth in foster care. www.youthcomm.org

planning whenever possible and look for co-parenting courses that you can offer expectant and new parents. New York City's Administration for Children's Services recently began offering co-parenting classes for young parents in foster care; in focus groups run by Rise parents, couples told us the classes helped develop skills to manage the stresses that come with co-parenting.

HELP US THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT CONNECTIONS

Having no one to turn to for help once we leave care is one of the worst things that can happen to us, and it puts our children at greater risk. Help us think creatively about making connections and long-lasting relationships before we leave care so it doesn't happen to us. This might include helping us reconnect to a foster mother we were once close to, a special teacher we lost touch with, a church we once attended, or a long-lost relative. Even if relationships are bumpy in our teen years, we often find our way back to supportive adults as we get older.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

In this story, Michael describes how his brother became a resource for him and allowed him to get his daughter out of foster care. His story illustrates the importance of looking to biological kin as a potential source of support.

Family After Foster Care I want my daughter to feel the love and security I finally found

BY MICHAEL BLAMO

I met my child's mother when I was 21 and she was 22. I'd grown up in foster care, and she'd come from drama, so we understood each other. Our relationship lasted for over four years and for a long time it was good.

In the last year, she became pregnant and we had a daughter. I really thought it was going to be this perfect thing. Family Matters or Full House.

Even though I didn't live with my daughter and her mother, I was there every day. Having my daughter in my arms was amazing. I fed her, changed her and would lay her on my chest every night, putting her to sleep. I realized I could live through her—giving her all the things I'd lacked.

But pregnancy seemed to make my girlfriend feel worse. At the hospital, the doctor said she had postpartum depression and the social worker called CPS. At first CPS helped us connect to services. Then one day my girlfriend attacked her mother in front of the worker and the damage was done.

The next day we had to go to court. I lived in a room in supportive housing and had no space to take my daughter, so I decided to let her live with my girlfriend's mother. Eventually,

though, CPS removed her and put her in a foster home. I didn't want what happened to me to happen to my daughter.

TOO MANY LOSSES

I was 6 when my brother, sister and I were taken from our mother and moved to my aunt's house. She and my brother argued a lot. When I was 9 my aunt let him go. Next my sister was packing and leaving. Soon I lost touch with both of them.

Surprisingly, my aunt and I actually grew close. But when I was 14, my aunt became unstable, and I was placed in a foster home. All those losses made me feel like I couldn't relate to anything that didn't involve destruction and chaos. I began to heal at 17, when my brother found me, and I lived with my mother again for a year and a half.

I NEEDED HELP

When my daughter went into foster care, the sense of hopelessness I'd had as a child began to resurface. The first time I visited my daughter in foster care, I knelt down with my arms out and she ran to me. It was like a scene from a movie. But I also saw that she seemed held back and confused.

After that visit, I explained the situation to my brother. Immediately, he and his new told me they would be willing to be my daughter's foster parents.

Things are so different now that my daughter is around people that love her. She's herself again, only happier. And I have a sense of peace. I see my daughter regularly, and I also get to learn about parenting from my brother and his wife.

Now I'm just waiting for housing so that my daughter and I can be reunified. I want my daughter to always feel the love and security I've finally found.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Like many young parents, Railei described needing her foster parents to respect her as a mother before she could accept their support.

Growing Into Motherhood

I needed to feel like the most important person to my son before I could let anyone else in

BY RAILEI GIRARD

I am a foster care alumna. I first went into care at 3 and exited for good at 18.

When I was in care, I felt I had no one to depend on. I couldn't even be certain I would stay in one house for more than a week.

I was also sexually abused, both in care and in my family. I was beaten, too—in a foster home with a belt, and in my biological home with hangers and switches.

In one foster home I was put in a dog kennel to punish me. Over time I developed night terrors, which were like re-living everything bad I had gone through.

WHAT DID THEY WANT?

Then, when I was 16, I moved in with a foster family that was determined to love me. I had a hard time believing they could treat me with kindness without any type of return, though I also couldn't figure out what I had that they could possibly want.

The most difficult relationship was with my foster mother. Even when she was doing something nice I regarded it with disinterest. I yelled a lot and was just plain rude.



PREGNANT AND ENRAGED

During this time, I met a man. I used to go on walks in the park near my house when night terrors kept me awake, and as we started talking more and more he would join me. He told me it was because he worried about me. It was nice to feel like someone finally cared.

But then he had sex with me without my knowledge or permission when I was taking heavy sleeping medication. I came out pregnant.

Pregnancy wasn't something I thought I ever wanted. I couldn't breathe. I was overwhelmed with raw emotions: pain, anger, confusion.

I didn't feel I could handle an abortion. I already suffered from PTSD and bipolar disorder. I was also sure that everyone would judge me and not believe me if I explained how my son was conceived, so I kept it a secret. Inside, I felt I would never be able to depend on anyone.

LETTING NO ONE IN

I took a long time for my foster parents to prove to me that wasn't true.

I was in their home for all of my pregnancy. After I gave birth to my son, I went back to school, and I also found a job in order to make a better life for my son and me. I worked long hours. It was very hard.

I appreciated that I could depend on my foster parents to watch my son when I couldn't. But when I was around, I would not let anyone in the house help me with my son. I would always remind my foster parents that they weren't his grandparents.

I wasn't afraid they would try to take him from me. I'd done research and knew my rights. I was afraid of my son not wanting me.

I was afraid of him loving someone else and choosing them over me. I also was afraid of how difficult it was at first for me to attach to my son. My son was born in the midst of so

much anger and pain. It was hard for me to fall in love with him like everyone kept telling me I would. But that just made me more stubborn not to let anyone in.

A NEW RESPECT

When my foster parents tried to tell me how to care for my son, I felt like they were trying to make me do it their way, not mine. If he cried and they thought they knew better, they would correct me. They would tell me when to burp him, or what to do when he wouldn't sleep.

Every time they said I needed to do this or that, I felt judged. I felt like I needed to prove to myself that I could be a mother and that my son needed me.

So one night after a fight with my foster mother, I moved out. I managed on my own for two months before life got complicated and I moved back in.

But those two months gave me a new respect for all my foster family did for me.

When I returned, they also began to treat me more like a mother who could take care of her own baby. That allowed me to open up more to their help.

OPEN TO LOVE

As we opened up to each other, I came to appreciate that my son was surrounded by love in a way I'd never been.

When my foster parents held my son, their faces lit up. They'd read books to him and play patty cake and talk in stupid voices to make him laugh. They'd also buy him clothes and spoil him.

Seeing my son get that love made me feel so good and helped me feel more confident as a mother. I finally felt I was doing things right. I really can't describe how special it was that his life was so different than mine was as a child.

SPOTLIGHT

California Helps Young Parents Plan for Parenthood

In California, state legislators and child welfare systems have been making efforts to improve outcomes for young parents in and aging out of foster care. These efforts come on the heels of the state's decision to extend until 21 the age that youth can remain in care, and coincide with a large-scale California study that found that rates of substantiated abuse and neglect among children born to teen mothers with their own history of reported or substantiated maltreatment were 2 to 3 times higher than the rates of children whose teen mothers had not been reported to CPS. Steps taken include:

In 2016, California passed a bill to improve access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for young parents in foster care, and provide training for social workers, judges and foster parents on adolescent sexuality.

The same year, the California legislature more than doubled the payment given to young parents in foster care to provide for their children, a move that anecdotal evidence suggests has allowed more young parents to remain in school full-time. Independently, Los Angeles County made that payment available starting three months before a baby is born, an incentive for young parents to come forward and begin planning for their babies instead of keeping their pregnancies hidden.

Similarly, a yearly statewide conference for expectant and parenting youth focuses on helping young parents plan for how having a child might impact every aspect of their lives. Los Angeles County has also made home-visiting services available to 100% of their parenting youth. Home-visiting programs have been found to reduce child abuse and neglect.

Lastly, California Youth Connection was successful in lobbying for the passage of a bill that prohibits the use of anything in a parent's case file from their childhood in foster care to determine their fitness as a parent or to remove their child from their custody. It is unclear whether this bill has impacted removal rates. But it sends a message to parents in or who grew up in care that they have the same rights to privacy as other parents.

"What kind of captivated our legislature was the opportunity these young people offer," said Amy Lemley, executive director of the John Burton Foundation, a California-based organization dedicated to improving outcomes for at-risk youth "These young people are in the care and custody of the system. We have a massive opportunity if we take it."

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Many young parents in care say they have no one they can really talk to. Here T.N. describes how connecting to family, peers and a mentor helped her turn her life around.

'I Was Her Little Flower That Was Blossoming' Mentors and peers helped me find my way back to hope

BY T. N.

"Girl, you better stop crying," my grandmother said.

My grandmother was my warrior. When I was little, everything she did was right in my eyes. I just couldn't understand why I wasn't supposed to cry.

But my grandma raised four children and four grandchildren, and she worked too. There was no time for emotions.

My grandma also grew up in an era when colored women had no rights and no voice. Why speak about your feelings if there's no one to hear you?

LIFE ISN'T KIND

As I grew older, though, my emotions didn't want to stay locked away. When I was 15, I met my son's father. Nine months later here comes my love child. I was so angry at myself when I realized he wasn't going to be there for my son. Hadn't my grandma taught me that life doesn't give you kindness?

I was strong enough to walk away from him. But I didn't know how to be strong when my warrior left a few years later.

I entered foster care on November 22, 2010, at 7 p.m. when I was 17 because my grandma had grown too sick to care for

me. She passed away two years later, on December 7, 2012 at 12 noon.

After she got sick, I'd tell her I loved her, and she'd do her best to say it back. She told me: "Keep a smile on that boy's face and never allow anyone to take him from you. He is yours."

But how could she leave and expect me to hold back my tears? The pain of being alone in foster care also made me wild. Son I got myself into the fast life, dancing in the clubs. I'd drink Hennessy and Red Bull and soon I'd feel less and less there. I went to work around noon and came home at 8 or 9 p.m., sometimes later.



My son was 2, just come into the world, spending all that time with my foster mother. It might have seemed that I wasn't thinking about him when I left him there like that. But I left him because kids can feel your sadness. I didn't want to scare him with mine.

PROTECTED AGAIN

I was probably heading toward a very bad place. But after a few months, my cousin started to call me. She is 10 years older than me and was also raised by my grandma. She'd say, "Let's get out and clear our

minds." We'd get our nails done, or have Sunday dinner. She was very emotional, and that touched my heart. I felt protected again, like I had when I was living in my grandma's big house. I was her little flower that was blossoming.

Soon I started going to a support group for young moms at Lawyers for Children, the agency where I had my lawyer. It felt good to know that the thoughts running through my mind were also running through other moms' minds. Mary Ellen, the group's social worker, would call or text me after hours or on the weekend just to make sure I was OK. By the time I aged out of foster care, I finally felt like I was on the right path.



RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOGNIZING TRAUMA AND OFFERING TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES

Parents in Rise’s “My Story, My Life” project often said that, when they were new parents, it was too painful to think about how their childhood experiences might be affecting their parenting because they weren’t ready to face the pain they still carried. Often, they really didn’t believe that they could heal from everything they’d been through. They also wanted to believe that pain is a normal part of life, so they didn’t have to feel ashamed of victimization.

But as they got older, sometimes that changed. Some hit a crisis that made them say, “I’ve got to face my past or I could lose my children forever.” Other times, people along the way planted the idea that healing might be possible, and over time that seed of hope grew.

Frontline staff are not therapists, and their job is not to diagnose or address trauma. But by understanding some of the ways that trauma can impact behavior, they can play a role in reducing parents’ defensiveness. For instance, when parents seem distant or controlling, their actions may be an effort to protect the child. As one mother, the victim of sexual abuse, explained:

“When my daughter turned 5, our life together changed. I became

unstable with worry. I know now from going to therapy that her turning 5 was a huge trigger for me that I was not aware of. My own life had fallen apart when I was 5—that’s when I was raped for the first time, and when I entered foster care.

Dropping my daughter off at school opened up doors of fear in my heart, thoughts of her getting molested or hurt and fears that I had no control anymore. As time passed I became overprotective to the max. I overdressed her because I didn’t want her body to show. I started calling her school or popping up there. I reacted with panic and passion because I thought if someone harmed her, I could never forgive myself.”

Therapy that helps us understand that our reactions are normal given the trauma we've been through—and gives us the tools to address that trauma—can help us believe that a positive future is possible for us and our children.

Many parents have also spent their lives running from pain and don’t know how to stop. They may be drinking or using drugs or staying out late not because they don’t care about their children, but because those things help them feel good enough to care for their children. You can reduce parents’ defensiveness by becoming curious about what they’re feeling, even if, at the same time, it’s your job to let them know that their behavior may be putting them at risk of losing custody of their

The following excerpts from interviews with experts in the field can help child welfare professionals better understand trauma, and may also be good to share with parents.

Trauma 101

What trauma is, how it can affect parents and what helps

Excerpted from interviews with Susan Chinitz, infant mental health consultant with the Center for Court Innovation, Amelia Franck-Meyer, CEO of Anu Family Services, and Bessel Van der Kolk, medical director of the Justice Treatment Institute's Trauma Center in Massachusetts.

Q: HOW CAN TRAUMA IMPACT PARENTS?

CHINITZ: Trauma is an experience that makes a person fear for her life—or a loved one's life—and overwhelms a person's ability to cope. People can be traumatized by things like earthquakes or 9/11. But research shows that the most devastating trauma occurs when people who are supposed to love us and keep us safe do us harm.

Things like physical or sexual abuse or domestic violence, especially when they occur in close relationships, can shake people's sense of trust and make it hard for people to trust anyone. Trauma can also hurt how people feel about themselves, even though the abuse is not their fault.

Trauma can also impact how parents respond to their children. Parents may have more trouble staying calm with their children if they've experienced a lot of trauma. That's because, when we're in dangerous situations, our bodies and brains are programmed to have quick, automatic reactions—to either fight or flee. But for people who have had a lot of traumatic experiences, their fight or flight reaction is easily triggered, even by things that are not dangerous, like when a child cries. A mother who has experienced a lot of violence might find the child's hitting or tantrum aggressive and scary.

When people have had many harmful experiences, they also try to protect themselves from their own suffering by blocking out their feelings, and they may block out their children's feelings, too. Sometimes, that leads parents to not be as concerned about danger as they should be. They might think their kids need to toughen up because survival is hard. Or they may have grown up with so much danger they experience it as normal. Other times, parents can become overly protective of their children because they see danger everywhere.

Q: HOW CAN PARENTS HEAL—AND BUILD A SAFE BOND WITH THEIR CHILDREN?

CHINITZ: Some parents are aware of how past trauma is affecting them with their children. But a very big part of trauma

is avoidance—wanting to not have to reflect on what you've been through because it's too painful. In therapy, we try to help parents feel safe becoming more reflective and slow down their automatic responses.

VAN DER KOLK: A therapist should help you feel safe to feel what you feel and encourage you to really be curious about yourself. A central part of healing trauma is finding a way to feel fully alive in the present without blocking out your feelings.

It's also important to learn how to calm your body down. It's hard to heal from trauma if your body is afraid to be touched or to take in the milk of human kindness. Practices that come from Asia, like meditation, Tai Chi and yoga, can help. The arts are also very important in helping people imagine alternative realities, though these kinds of programs are not usually offered by foster care systems. I've met so many survivors in my career by now, and the people who do the best are people who are able to imagine realities that are different from what they've experienced.

FRANCK MEYER: In Minnesota and Wisconsin, child welfare systems hire us to work with young mothers as individual coaches. Our goal is to help moms understand that when they lose control, or get so stressed they tune their kids out, their responses are normal given the trauma they've experienced.

At those times, they're in survival brain, but with healing and practice they can get back into thinking brain. Teaching mothers this takes them from feeling like they keep messing up and it's hopeless to thinking it's a pattern they can predict and begin to change.

CHINITZ: Once parents are able to slow down their automatic responses, they can begin to reflect on what's going on in their child's mind—not just their child's behavior but what a child's emotional state might be. Is your child expressing frustration? Curiosity? Is he trying to get your attention? Is he scared? We try to help parents stand in their kids' shoes, see how their children feel and respond in a safe, nurturing way.

That's especially important when children have experienced trauma themselves—including the trauma of being placed in foster care. We use play as a way to help parents and children enter the story of what has happened in a family. Telling the story gives parents a chance to assure their children that whatever happened in the past is not going to happen again. For parents and children, trauma does not have to become a place where everybody's stuck for the rest of their lives.



SIGNS OF STRESS RELATED TO TRAUMA

- **AVOIDANCE:** trying to avoid reminders of a trauma, like not going to a certain block, not seeing certain people, or not talking about it.
- **"HYPERVIGILANCE":** staying "on alert" all of the time to try to stay safe, even if you're in danger.
- **OVERREACTING:** reacting with anger, sadness, worry, or fear that is out of proportion to the situation.
- **UNDER-REACTING:** "just sitting there" emotionally or physically despite danger, such as showing no emotion after bad news.
- **CHANGES IN EATING OR SLEEPING:** too much or too little are both warning signs.
- **NUMBNESS:** feeling like you're not connected to yourself or not really there.
- **'LOSING TIME':** not being sure how you got from one place to another, or what happened to minutes or hours.
- **NIGHTMARES OR BAD MEMORIES** that seem to push into your mind

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

What Is Parent-Child Therapy?

Kira Santana and Sara Werner are two mothers who attended parent-child therapy at the Albert Einstein Early Childhood Center's Infant-Parent Project.

SARA: When I first came to parent-child therapy, I was nervous. It's not easy for me to trust people because of all the things I've been through. I was afraid my parenting therapist, Hazel, 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? 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 blind trust in Hazel. I changed my mind from experience. I can see for myself that she's not judgmental and she believes in me. I 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 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. Even if I'm a child at heart, I have to set rules for my children to help them in the long term.

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. It teaches him that he can't get his way all of the time. In this parenting program, I'm learning to make rules to protect my children, and I'm doing that in a positive way. That's going to help them achieve in life.

children.

You can also plant seeds of hope by providing information about trauma and by referring parents to trauma-informed services that offer tools to build the parent-child bond. (See pages x and x.) You can let young parents know that it's natural for people to parent the way they were raised, but parenting styles are also a choice. As Rise contributor Piazadora Footman explained:

"When my grandmother raised me, she acted like children should have no say-so, no thoughts, no feelings and, point blank, no voice. When my son was young, I found myself inhabited by my grandmother's ghost. I treated him the same way. Then I went to a video parenting program that 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 my son to listen to me. From our experience, I learned that I needed to listen to him, too."

LEARN ABOUT TRAUMA

Take advantage of opportunities to learn about trauma (including reading the interviews on page 20). The more you know, the more you'll be able to respond and talk to parents in ways that help.

PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT TRAUMA

Providing parents with clear, useful information about trauma can help us understand our own feelings better, as well as what we can do to manage those feelings. (See pages x and x for information you can share with parents.) Offering us the opportunity to read stories about trauma by other parents, either on our own or with an adult, can be a good way to approach a difficult topic.

REFER US TO TRAUMA-INFORMED THERAPY

Both parents and children are frequently misdiagnosed with ADHD, bipolar, or ODD when their underlying problem is trauma. It can be harmful to rehash painful experiences with a therapist not trained in treating trauma or to take medications that blunt but can't treat trauma symptoms. Trauma-informed therapy helps us understand that our reactions are normal given the trauma we've been through—and gives us the tools to address that trauma. It also can help us believe that a positive future is possible for us and our children. As parent Sharkkarah Harrison explained:

"My therapist was trained in trauma-focused therapy and she helped me talk about a lifetime of trauma and realize what I had not realized before that I was still carrying the hurt from my childhood and that that hurt was stopping me from taking care of myself and my children... Over time, my therapist helped me accept that I couldn't be expected to know how to create stability for my family when it wasn't something I had learned or been taught. But I could learn from my mistakes and grow."

Make sure we're not sent to the kind of therapy where we're just asked to talk about our past week after week. That's just like reliving painful experiences without getting help.

REFER US TO PARENT-CHILD THERAPY

Parent-child therapy, also known as dyadic therapy, can be helpful for all parents, but particularly for parents who have experienced trauma because it focuses on helping parents gain confidence, feel good about themselves and build a parent-child bond. Growing up in care, often we've spent a lot of our lives feeling ashamed, so feeling good is important. We might not have had many positive adult-child relationships, so learning to feel connected is important too. Too many parenting classes teach the mechanics of discipline but don't show how to form a bond.

CONNECT PARENTS TO PROGRAMS THAT EXPLORE THE MEANING OF SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

Many of us have experienced the trauma of sexual abuse, in and out of the system. Sexual abuse can make it harder to feel like we have control over our bodies, and that can lead to second pregnancies that we might not want or be ready for.

It's also important that we have access to contraception and birth control, and that the adults in our lives talk to us about how and why to use it.

Find opportunities to allow us to talk about the meaning of sex and relationships, one-on-one or in discussion groups with our peers outside of school or group homes. (In those settings, there's too much chance for gossip.)

It can help when adults find ways of letting us know that they're comfortable talking about difficult issues like sexual abuse. As one parent explained, "It's unlikely that young people would bring up the issue, but if they had an adult that they trusted, they might appreciate it if that adult were able to bring it up with them."

USE PEER SUPPORT TO REDUCE SHAME

When we've grown up in foster care, we've grown up with shame. Connecting us to peers and to advocates with similar life experiences helps us feel less stigmatized and less alone. As Lashaunda Harris, clinical director of a home visiting program for mothers who abused alcohol or drugs during pregnancy explains: "The vast majority of mothers in our program were in foster care as children. Some of our staff members, including myself, are also parents who have a history of substance abuse and/or child welfare involvement. What we find is that it's not enough to have services. A lot of moms who grew up in care need someone they can trust, because without that trust they won't go to services."

If you are having trouble talking to a parent about trauma or about trauma-informed services, consider bringing in a parent who can share her own experiences.

EXPLAIN HOW OR WHY A SERVICE COULD HELP

Trauma can make us feel hopeless, and so can all the times we've been sent to services that don't help. That can make us believe that all the system wants to do is label us.

Be careful not to send the message that services are going to fix what's wrong with us. It can help to hear that a certain service will help us learn more about our children's developmental needs and stages, or even just that it's a service that other parents have liked.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

It's normal for people who have gone through trauma to find ways to block out overwhelming feelings. In this story, Tyesha describes how a lifetime of running from her feelings led her to lose her children.

Everything Felt Like Nothing

I ran from my feelings and I didn't know how to stop

BY TYESHA ANDERSON

When you spend too much time as a kid in survival mode—feeling like you have no one to rely on and blocking out the pain whatever ways you can—sometimes you don't realize in time that you have to change.

RUNNING WILD

I was raised by my grandmother until I was 10, when my mom decided she was done doing drugs and wanted her children. To me, it seemed like one big adventure. But when I was 11, child protective services found us living with my mother even though my grandma still had custody. My brother and I were remanded into care. I felt like I was all alone in foster care and that I had to take care of my little brother, too. It was a year and a half until we were allowed to go home.

By that time I was a teenager, though. I had seen some things and gone through some hurts and the relationship between my mom and me went totally wrong. Eventually she gave me subway fare and told me not to come back.

My life became a series of crazy adventures. Underneath, I was in pain. First I was in the streets, then I went to Covenant House, then to a group home. Then I ran away and became a stripper. Everything I was doing felt like nothing. The sex, the stripping, the running the streets were all a means of survival.

At 16, I got pregnant with twin boys. I was happy to finally mean something to someone. For a time, I also found safety. My boyfriend's sister became my angel and took me under her wing. She was my friend, my sister, my mother. But when she moved away, life became a whirlwind again.

When my twins were about 2, I started using cocaine. At 19, I got pregnant again and moved in with the father, who was also an addict. He was selling drugs but he wasn't making

enough so I prostituted. Pretty soon we were both using crack and he was putting his hands on me. Life was crazy.

I COULDN'T STOP USING

It was during that time that child welfare came back into my life. My worker was young, like me, and I felt like she understood me and tried to be good to me. I was living in an apartment with no heat, and preventive services made sure my apartment got fixed.

When my son was born, our blood tests came back positive but my worker didn't take my baby. She gave me a chance to stop. At first I did. I entered a program. I'd take my baby and they'd feed us. I felt safe and supported. I wasn't prostituting. I had friends. I had normalcy. I was happy. I loved it there.

But I didn't last long. Eventually I lost my housing, my boyfriend started hitting me again, I started using cocaine again, I gave my twins to my grandma, and I went crazy partying to forget everything that had happened in my life.

SUDDEN REALIZATION

The moment I saw the child welfare van and the cops, I realized for the first time that I was really going to lose my children. I felt like somebody had ripped out my heart. I told myself, "You let it happen. You did it. You're a prostitute. Your boyfriend smacks you around. You live on the street. At least when you had your kids you were

somebody's mother. Now you're not."

I tried to run away but I knew I couldn't so I went and faced my worker. Because she was my friend she didn't take my baby out my arms. She asked the officer to take him.

I LEARNED TOO LATE

After that I tried to stop using but I wasn't ready deal with all that had happened in my life. Finally, the courts decided too much time had passed. I had two choices: Either I could give my rights away with the agreement that I could be in my children's lives, or I could refuse to sign the "conditional surrender" and never see my children again.

It broke my heart, but given my choices, I chose to sign. Today I have five years clean and my husband is my rock. He is the safety that helped me stop running. I also have a child at home, and I continue to see my other children, who were adopted. Still, I often feel like less of a person because I gave my children up. My biggest regret is not being able to be their mother.

When you don't know anything but running, sometimes the hardest thing in the world is learning how to stop.





RECOMMENDATIONS

DEALING WITH SAFETY CONCERNS

One of the most powerful messages Rise has heard over the years is that parents who grew up in care often feel like they don't have even one person they can trust to talk to about parenting challenges. They feel like nobody is going to be there for them, and that if they do tell people their business, it is going to be used against them. While they are still in foster care, they report being regularly threatened with being reported. Those threats often happen not after serious conversations about safety, but instead of them. Both parents and professionals also describe how everyday parenting conflicts with foster parents or group home staff can escalate into unwarranted reports.

Foster parents and group home staff need training about steps they can take when conflicts are serious but don't present an immediate safety concern. They also need someone to call on to mediate disputes that they can't resolve on their own. (This is something new tried in New York City—see page 26). When agencies provide foster parents and staff with tools to resolve conflict, they're less likely to make threats or call in reports out of frustration.

Foster parents and frontline staff also need training in how to intervene sensitively and transparently when safety concerns do require a call. As much as parents don't want to be threatened, it's worse to be investigated without being warned. When calls are handled fairly and

transparently, parents may even come to respect the person who made the call. As one parent who grew up in care explained:

"When I had my third child, I had an organization called Robin's Nest doing home-visiting with me. When my relationship turned violent, my worker told me: 'I have to make the phone call. Your relationship is bad for you, and either you're going to get hurt or your kids are.' I was so scared but I didn't feel betrayed. I told her, 'I respect that you are telling me.'"

Things like marijuana use or conflicts with our partner may not seem like neglect to us, especially when we're working so hard to provide for our children.

DON'T MAKE THREATS

We know that caseworkers, foster parents and group home staff may worry about our children. But regularly threatening to call in a case makes things

worse. In the short term, feeling threatened can elevate our own rage or shut us down. That's bad for our children. In the long term, fear makes it harder for us to be honest when we're struggling, which can also make our children less safe. No one can learn when they're afraid, and that includes parents. Instead, if we have conflicts we can't resolve, call on someone at the agency to help mediate the dispute.

MAKE SURE WE UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERNS

Concerns over things like marijuana use, not taking medication for mental health issues, or conflicts with our partner may not seem to us like neglect, especially when we're working so hard to provide for our

children. Being accused of neglect in those situations seems unfair and surprising. Take the time to really explain why you see our behavior as a safety risk, and what you think needs to change. Put your concerns in writing, too, so we can think about what you're saying after we talk.

BE READY TO PROBLEM SOLVE

Be willing to listen to our perspective and help us problem solve. For instance, some of us have been prescribed medication or told to go to therapy that hasn't helped. Take the time to understand what is really going on, and see if it's possible to come up with solutions with us.

If we are not ready to problem solve, and are at risk of having a report called in, then tell us that this is the risk we are taking. Ask us one more time, "What can we do?"

BE TRANSPARENT

If you do decide to call in a report, let us know before you do. Being blindsided by a knock on the door or surprised by a petition to show up in court is a betrayal. Being told directly gives us greater ability to understand the seriousness of the allegation and change course.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

More than anything, what we heard from young parents in care was how judged and at risk they felt of losing their children, and how hard it was to trust help offered while under scrutiny. Here Rhonneil illustrates what that threat feels like day to day.

Unsafe Parents don't ask for help when they feel threatened

BY RHONNEIL COOPER

This past summer, another young mother in my foster home got child protective services called on her. That got me watched, too.

The first time it happened, it was 10 p.m. I was in bed asleep with my 2-month-old son. The crib was a few steps away, but I was breastfeeding every two hours and I did not want to keep getting up.

"Knock, knock, knock," I heard on my bedroom door.

When I opened the door, the investigator was there with a notebook in her hand. She peeked in, wrote something down and said to me, "Hello, Rhonneil. Do you know you're not supposed to be in the bed with your baby?"

She was perfectly nice about it. But after she left, I felt scared and angry. I thought, "What if she reports me?"

MY BIGGEST FEAR

I am 16 years old, and my son Malachi is 6 months old. The day my son was born, babies were crying all around, but as I looked at Malachi lying there wrapped in a white blanket with his wondering eyes, and I touched his tiny fingers, all I could focus on was bonding with my baby boy.

When I was 1, my mom left Grenada and moved to the United States. After that, I was raised by my grandmother, who took great care of me. But she died when I was 6.

When I was 8, I came to the U.S. But both my mother and aunt worked all the time, so I was just there with no one to show me any kind of love.

I was 13 when I went into foster care. When I got pregnant with Malachi, I promised that he would never experience the same loss and loneliness.

THE ACHE TO CHANGE

When you're in foster care, though, you feel watched all the time and you see so many mothers lose their babies.

Take the situation of a girl I know, Tyesha. One night when her baby was only a few weeks old, Tyesha told me, her foster mother came into her room and said: "You can't be in the bed with the baby, you know that, Tyesha."

Tyesha got so mad that she started throwing things at her foster mother while holding her baby. The foster mother reported her and she wound up being separated from her baby for six months.

Then there's Tiny, a girl in my group home. Tiny was always so depressed. Every day she dressed in the same baggy blue sweats with her head tie on. All she would do is sit at the computer on Facebook looking at beautiful daughter she was separated from, eating White Castle burgers, drinking cranberry juice and crying.

When you live with threats, and you see the girls around you lose their children, it makes it harder to ask for help, even when you want it. You don't want to get help from a system that is set up to judge you.

SPOTLIGHT

New York City Focuses on Reducing Removals

In 2012, New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) analyzed data on young mothers in foster care and discovered that nearly 1 out of 3 mothers (29.3%) had their children removed from their custody before they'd ever left the system. Since then, ACS and its Teen Specialist Unit (TSU) have worked to improve those outcomes. Removals remain heart-breakingly high. Still, according to new data that ACS provided to Rise, the number of removals of children from mothers in foster care between 2014 and 2017 decreased significantly, to an average of 21%, or roughly 1 out of 5 mothers.

With support from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the TSU has worked to reduce removals on three levels:

Providing resources to youth and educating them about issues that might lead to an investigation: Among those efforts, TSU members work to enroll all parents in home-visiting programs.

The TSU has also worked with the mayor's office to provide training about relationship violence and about co-sleeping, often a source of conflict that can lead to a child protective report. The TSU invited Rise to present its Know Your Rights Training to parents in the system. The training teaches parents the kinds of actions that might lead to an investigation, as well as their rights and responsibilities during an investigation.

Working to resolve conflicts between young parents and residential staff before a report is made: A member of the TSU is stationed three days a week at all New York City mother-child residences. Beyond working with young parents to connect them to resources, TSU members are also present to mediate conflicts between parents and staff.

Bringing greater knowledge of preventive resources to Initial Child Safety Conferences after a report has been made: In 2015, ACS placed the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), which also handles reports made about foster parents, in charge of investigations of first-time reports of parents in foster care. It also established a protocol for OSI to inform the TSU of Initial Child Safety Conferences involving youth in care. (These are the conferences where the decision is made whether to remove a child.) Members of the TSU regularly attend those conferences and suggest resources that might mitigate the need for a removal.

Members of the Teen Specialist Unit regularly attend child safety conferences and suggest resources that might mitigate the need for a removal.

Sabine Chery, assistant commissioner in the Office of Older Youth Services, said there was initial skepticism among staff at OSI and at the mother-child residences about involving a third party in their work, but that over time the three entities built greater trust. The biggest challenge, said Chery, has been turnover, both at OSI and at the residences.

The second area where ACS has focused is father engagement. In that work, too, building trust has been a slow process, necessary even just to find out the identities of fathers.

"We started out with a cohort of maybe 300 moms in 2014," said Chery. "Then we developed a survey and assessment forms to interview all moms at facilities to find out who are the fathers. That was challenging. You know, if the father of my child is 30 years old and here I am 16, I may not want to tell you. We had to build relationships to get that out of young people." One motivation for the work was to ensure that fathers could be considered as placement resources if needed. "We don't want to see removals. But if babies are coming into care, they should go to fathers. We found that wasn't happening," said Chery.

ACS also wanted to find out which youth in care were fathers, but they discovered that often agencies themselves didn't know. "Many of the mothers weren't in foster care, and fathers were a little standoffish of telling

us who the mothers were for fear we'd be in their business," said Chery. "In 2016 we had a fathers' convening to try to show fathers that we're here to help." The TSU has worked to address some of fathers' biggest concerns, including child support and employment. They've also worked to expand foster home capacity so that it's possible for fathers to be in the home with their children.

Lastly, the TSU created a co-parenting workshop in collaboration with the Claremont Neighborhood Center to help young parents build the tools to parent together. The workshop focuses on communication, understanding child development and building promotive and protective factors. ACS has run the workshop five times since 2016, and trained 14 provider agencies to run it.

Chery says the biggest challenges "are really about engagement: engaging providers, engaging youth. The work is not easy, and it's not done overnight."



RECOMMENDATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGING AND ADDRESSING PAST FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCES AFTER REMOVAL

Many parents who were a part of Rise’s “My Story, My Life,” project lost their children in their 20s, after periods of stability and struggle. For these parents, one of the most common responses to removal was overwhelming shame.

As Washington State veteran parent Heather Cantamessa told Rise, “So many parents come from a place of shame. It’s not, ‘I made a mistake,’ but, ‘I am the mistake. I am worthless. I am unable to do anything different. This is who I am.’ When the system comes in, so often it reaffirms everything you’re afraid of because it’s all about your deficiencies.”

That shame is intensified when case files and family histories are used in meetings and in court to prove a pattern of dysfunction, rather than becoming the basis of a conversation about everything that parents have managed to overcome. Parents also feel angry at being held accountable for their missteps when the system has not held itself accountable for the suffering they experienced as children in the system.

The trauma of removal can make parents feel powerless, as they felt when they were first brought into the system as children. If their own parents didn’t succeed in reunifying with them, it can be even harder for parents to believe that it is possible for them reunify.

COMMUNICATE POSITIVE INTENTIONS

State regularly and repeatedly that your goal is to help us reunify with our children.

Ask about any specific fears a parent may have about placement. Many of us were abused in foster care and fear that our child will be abused in care.

ADDRESS PARENTS’ PAST FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCES AT INTAKE OR SOON AFTER

Ask about any specific fears a parent may have about placement. Many of us were abused in foster care and fear that our child will be abused in care. You don’t have to ask us to open up about past abuse, but you can ask, “Are there any types of placement or types of homes that you might especially worry about, or especially want for your child?”

LET US KNOW HOW THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED

If time has passed since we were in foster care, and the child welfare system in your jurisdiction has become more committed to reunifying families, you can help reduce our hopelessness by emphasizing how the system has changed.

CONNECT US TO SUCCESSFUL PEERS

We can believe in our own success if we meet other parents who have succeeded, including parent advocates who have been in our shoes.

LIMIT HOW PAINFUL PAST EVENTS ARE REHASHED IN MEETINGS AND IN COURT

Our childhood actions, diagnoses and victimization are all part of our case file if we grew up in foster care. Sitting in meetings or court where our childhood or teenage actions are discussed in detail, in front of strangers, can feel depressing, infuriating and embarrassing.

Expect us to be upset and angry, acknowledge that it can be hard for anyone to have their privacy invaded, and find ways to limit public disclosure and discussion of our past.

QUESTION WHAT'S WRITTEN IN CASE RECORDS

Many youth in foster care are misdiagnosed with ADHD, bipolar, ODD when the underlying problem is trauma. Question past diagnoses and ask for a trauma-informed mental health screening.

Work with us to document how we may have addressed problems from our past, such as substance abuse or behavioral issues. Don't assume that just because something is written in our file it is true.

BE AWARE OF BIAS

Our past is often presented as one enormous history of dysfunction, which can make it hard for us to get a fair hearing. Encourage us to talk about our strengths, and train professionals to look for strengths as well as for risks. That way, everyone has a more accurate view of our families and of the potential for our children to be safe at home. When people in the system only see our risk factors, justice isn't served.

RECOGNIZE TRAUMA REACTIONS

When we come back into the system as respondent parents, the one thing we said we would never let happen to our children has now happened. Sometimes we're so ashamed that we fail to show up for visits or meetings. Our rage and fear triggered by being back in the system can make it hard to work with anyone who represents that system.

Those reactions are not proof that we can't raise our children. They are normal reactions to what is happening to us. Everyone in the system needs training to understand trauma, to acknowledge what is happening to us and to keep separate how we react to professionals from how we react to our children.

Refer us to trauma-informed treatment so we can learn coping skills. Make it clear that threats against staff, or rage expressed in front of our children, will negatively affect our case.

LISTEN TO OUR CONCERNS

Often parents who grew up in care are dismissed when they say services aren't working or worse, labelled as "resistant" or "non-compliant." But being listened to when we expect to be ignored builds trust, and helps us find what we need rather than being stuck in frustration.

ADDRESS PRIVACY ISSUES

Let us know exactly what kind of information services will share with the court. We can't open up in services if we don't know if they're safe.

USE TRANSPARENCY TO BUILD TRUST

Use the court report as a tool for ongoing communication. Let us know,

"I want to write positive things in this court report, but right now I have some concerns that I would need to include. What steps could you take for me to write a report that helps the judge see that you are making progress?"

Make an appointment to meet with us prior to each court date to review the court report. If you are going to ask the court to reduce

visiting, or make another setback in the case, tell us directly and in person before the court hearing.

APOLOGIZE FOR THE PAST

When we come back into the system as respondent parents, it's rare that anyone has ever apologized to us or taken responsibility for what we suffered when we were children in the system.

An apology can make it easier for us to heal from our past trauma and acknowledge what we may have contributed to our current crisis. As one parent in Rise wrote:

"When my oldest daughter was taken into foster care, I had to confess. I had to speak to people who thought the worst of me. I had to take responsibility for my actions even though I didn't understand what I had done wrong. Years later, after I found a good therapist and I did understand, I reached out to each child I'd harmed to ask forgiveness. I wanted them to know: 'There was nothing wrong with you. The problem was with me.' After I did that, I wanted the same healing for myself from the foster care system, where I spent my entire childhood and where I experienced tremendous abuse."

So many parents come from a place of shame. It's not, 'I made a mistake,' but, 'I am the mistake. I am worthless. I am unable to do anything different. This is who I am.' When the system comes in, so often it reaffirms everything you're afraid of because it's all about your deficiencies.

SPOTLIGHT

How Case Planners Can Build Trust Using Transparency

BY KATHRYN HALL

When I first meet with a parent, they are often at the lowest point in their lives. Most were trying hard to be good parents before they met us. The message our arrival sends is that they have failed.

I also know I wield power over my clients' lives. To me, this is painful. My goal is to help families, but because the system has taken away their control, I often feel like I am doing the exact opposite. My ultimate goal is return power to them and bring humanity and respect into a relationship that is, unfortunately, lopsided.

HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

What helps me most is being as honest and transparent as possible. That means giving parents all the information I have during every stage of the case.

One of the most useful things to help parents understand where they are in the child welfare process is the court report I have to write. Many parents were in the system before I began working with them and typically they never knew what the case planner was going to say in court or what surprises they'd face when they arrived there.

In order to help build trust, every few weeks I review with them the service plan and progress and I tell them exactly what I would say in court based on their actions. This gives them a chance to share their view of the case and to regularly have the opportunity to troubleshoot issues with me before court.

I also ask parents what they think they need to do in order for me to write a report that would move them toward reunification. Almost always parents have clear ideas, and voicing those ideas, instead of being told what they have to do, seems to help them take those steps.

I ask parents what they think they need to do in order for me to write a report that would move them toward reunification. Almost always parents have clear ideas, and voicing those ideas seems to help them take those steps.

By speaking about the case regularly, parents feel respected and "in the loop." It also makes court less stressful. Over time this transparency has helped me build trust.

FROM "NONCOMPLIANCE"...

By providing this consistency, I was able to help one mother move from twice-weekly supervised visits to trial discharge over the span of about five months after the case had been stagnant for a year.

This mom was one of my first clients.

According to reports, she was often angry, sometimes rude. She had a substance abuse problem and was completely disengaged from her child. You could tell by the tone of the case planner's notes that the relationship was very negative and likely hostile.

When I first met this mom I recognized where some of her hostility might be coming from. I learned that her child had been in care for over a year and she had not been able to make any improvements in her case.

At every visit, mom made sure to explain to me how upset she was with the agency and how little she believed I could make a difference. I also learned that mom herself had been in foster care. She didn't have anyone to vent to or trust.

...TO TRUST AND INDEPENDENCE

I told her that I understood that she was upset, and that my goal was to be there for support. Still, her anger and outbursts continued. But as I worked openly with her—sharing what I would write in my report based on her actions, as well as what I wanted to write in my report in order to help her reunify—it was clear that she appreciated the honesty.

As she saw me report not only the challenges but also her successes she began to become more open to suggestions and she came to rely on me for support. By the end of our time together, she had met all mandates. I was proud of her, and I told her regularly.

I remember the look in her eyes when she told me she had enrolled herself in a preventive program that specialized in working with mothers with children under 5. She was so proud. She was no longer doing what the system was asking her to do. She was doing what she felt she needed to do to take care of her family.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Like many parents who grew up in foster care, Alisha believed that the system that had raised her couldn't do anything but harm her when they took her son. Parent advocates like Alisha can help parents believe in a different future.

Joining the System Parent advocates who have been both child and parent in the system are a powerful resource to improve it

BY ALISHA MAGLIO

The first time I visited my son in foster care, I walked into the same CPS office that I'd sat in as a child.

I saw my son looking at me with tears running down his face the same exact way I'd looked at my mom. As I walked through the halls of the same courthouse I watched the designs on the floor just like I used to. I was livid that child welfare was back in my life. I never would have been able to get through it if my son hadn't been on the other side.



My son was 8 when child protective services took him from me. I never hated myself more than I did right then and I wanted drugs to help me escape that self-loathing. I was shocked to find that this time through, though, the system actually helped me.

MY SON SAVED ME

The years I spent in foster care in Texas left me feeling never good enough. I switched homes and schools. Always the new kid, always alone. I never understood why I couldn't go home to my mom and siblings. It was all I wanted. It was my every prayer.

I got pregnant at 17 and my son saved me. I was determined to give my son what I never had. I also had absolutely no idea how to do that.

Lots of times I ran to the hospital because I didn't know who else could teach me to parent. When I couldn't figure out why my son's legs were blue, the hospital showed me I had the diaper too tight. When I thought he had an ear infection, they showed me how to get the wax out of his ears.

The only thing I knew how to do was love my son, and even that seemed unnatural because it was new to me.

THE WRONG SAVIOR

But I still had a void inside. When my son was 5, I tried not only to find a father for my son, but God, a savior, a family, a husband and anything else that would fill the void. All those things I needed but the man I chose was the wrong person.

He introduced me to a drug whose hypnotizing spell at first took away the pain and soon after took me to a depth of pain I cannot describe. I would hide in my room getting high for days, crying because I just couldn't stop. I prayed that if I died my son wouldn't find me. Over a two-year period, I lost my job, my house and eventually my son.

When my son was placed in foster care, I didn't think the system could do anything but harm me. But my son and I were lucky to have a supportive caseworker.

We were lucky, too, to be sent to therapists who understood addiction and understood us. While I worked on forgiving myself and finding peace with my past, my son was able to let out the anger he'd been keeping from me, and talk about the fear that his behavior could lead me to use again.

JOINING THE SYSTEM

A year after my son and I reunified, I ran into the caseworker who had originally investigated my case. She was proud of me and encouraged me to join a group of parent advocates from across Texas called the Parent Collaboration Group.

After I became a parent advocate and began helping other parents while improving the system, I realized that my defective life was also an asset. Those of us who have been both child and parent of the system can be a powerful resource to improve it.

I also joined a workgroup to bring understanding of addiction and quality addiction services to the child welfare system, two things that are hugely lacking. I was lucky to get good supports and services, but too many parents do not. It's unethical to break apart families without them. Today I try to show other parents what I finally learned—that their future can be different from their past.



RECOMMENDATIONS

ENGAGING PARENTS IN SYSTEM REFORM

For more than 5 years, 'My Story, My Life' participants have worked with professionals in New York City's child welfare system to create a system that is safer and more responsive to parents who are in or who grew up in care. Parents who have gone through 'My Story, My Life,' writing groups are now parent leaders at Rise who contribute to our publications and make presentations that illuminate how professionals can share power, inform parents, offer choices, improve services and truly listen to families.

We hope that child welfare systems around the country will find ways to partner with parents who grew up in foster care so that they can create strong, nurturing families across generations. Here is what Rise has worked with parents in New York City:

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Know Your Rights trainings for young mothers in foster care: Rise has educated dozens of parents at foster care agencies and at Covenant House, NYC's shelter for homeless adolescents. Parents who attend Rise's Know Your Rights workshops often describe feeling threatened by child protective investigations, yet don't know exactly what actions might get them charged with neglect. Developed and led in collaboration with the Center for Family Representation, this presentation brings clarity to these questions. Rise parent presenters share stories of strength and vulnerability, engage young parents in thinking about the steps they need to take to avoid an investigation and discuss how to ensure that their children are truly safe.

Stories published in Rise magazine: Through dozens of stories published in Rise over five years, including in two special issues just about generations in foster care, Rise has offered the insights and wisdom of

parents to their peers.

RESOURCES FOR STAFF

Presentation about young parents' experiences at an ACS convening and at Bronx Family Court: Presentations provided child welfare and court personnel with strategies for reducing the shame, distrust and anger parents feel returning to the system, and the trauma of feeling that they can't protect their own children from being hurt within that system.

ACS' updated Guide to Working With Young Parents: This practical toolkit for working with parenting youth in foster care developed by NYC's city child welfare agency, scheduled to be re-released this spring, includes Rise parents' recommendations and stories.

RESOURCES FOR PROGRAM PLANNING AND POLICY:

Center for the Study of Social Policy reports: Reviewing policy reports and running focus groups for CSSP brought young parents' perspectives into multiple reports that have influenced policy and planning nationwide.

ACS Focus Groups: Running peer-led focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of a co-parenting curriculum for NYC's Administration for Children's Services ensured real feedback was incorporated in curriculum revisions.

Legislative Education: Young parents testified at City Council hearings and met with City Council members and state representatives about expanding early childhood education and protecting funding for preventive services that support parents in keeping their children safe at home.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

'Luvya!'

How I learned this new foreign language of motherhood

BY MAYA NOY

One day I was Me, and the next I was Mom-Me. First came all the pain and all the screaming (my own), and then a tiny human being was placed on my chest.

When I held my daughter, I was scared that I might break her, but also fascinated by her tiny-ness.

But I was also scared. I kept saying, "Oh my God," over and over again. I wondered what was wrong with me. Don't all mothers fall in love and bond with their babies even before they are born, and then after the birth, it's love at first sight? Not me.

My own childhood had not made me feel loved, and I was extremely worried about whether I could do better with my own daughter. How could I be responsible for taking care of and loving another person, when I felt so un-taken care of, and so unloved?

A CASE OF BRAIN STRAIN

I also had very little support. My mother and I were distant, and even though I lived with Jaiya's father, he wasn't much help.

The first three months were the hardest. I screamed at my boyfriend whenever I was frustrated, and I was frustrated a lot. I screamed because I was in pain, screamed because I couldn't figure out how to breastfeed or pump. I screamed because I was tired, hungry, hot, cold, and mostly because Jaiya just would not stop crying (so it seemed).

I don't think there was a moment I did not feel helpless or totally overwhelmed! I have always felt like I have a black cloud over my head, and at first, becoming a mother only made that cloud darker.

Then I would start thinking about stories I'd heard of mothers wanting to abandon the child, or just ignore the child completely. I could understand that. I went over and over it in my mind thinking, "I do not want to do that to my child, so I

will do whatever it takes." Still, the stress I felt at first left no room for love.

FINDING MY SOFT SPOT

I am not sure when a feeling of love for my daughter developed. Our bond grew in little ways.

When she seemed agitated or restless, I would try singing and she seemed to quiet down to listen to me. It was a sweet feeling. I thought, "That's real love," because I can't sing to save my life!

I also decided to train myself to say "I love you." Love was never spoken of when I was growing up. Those words were the first I learned of this new foreign language of motherhood.

I remember the first time: pajamas on, Jaiya flat on her back in the crib, lights low, baby lullabies in the background, a quick kiss, and I'm just staring because I still can't believe there's a baby in my apartment!

All the while I'm thinking, "I have to say it. I just have to. I have to start now before it's too late. It will be harder the longer I wait." I played it over and over in my head before spitting the words out like they were a bad taste in my mouth: "Luvya!" Quick and quiet.

It was frustrating to say I love you to a person who just cries, eats and poops. But I said it every night. I

found that the more I said it, the more I meant it.

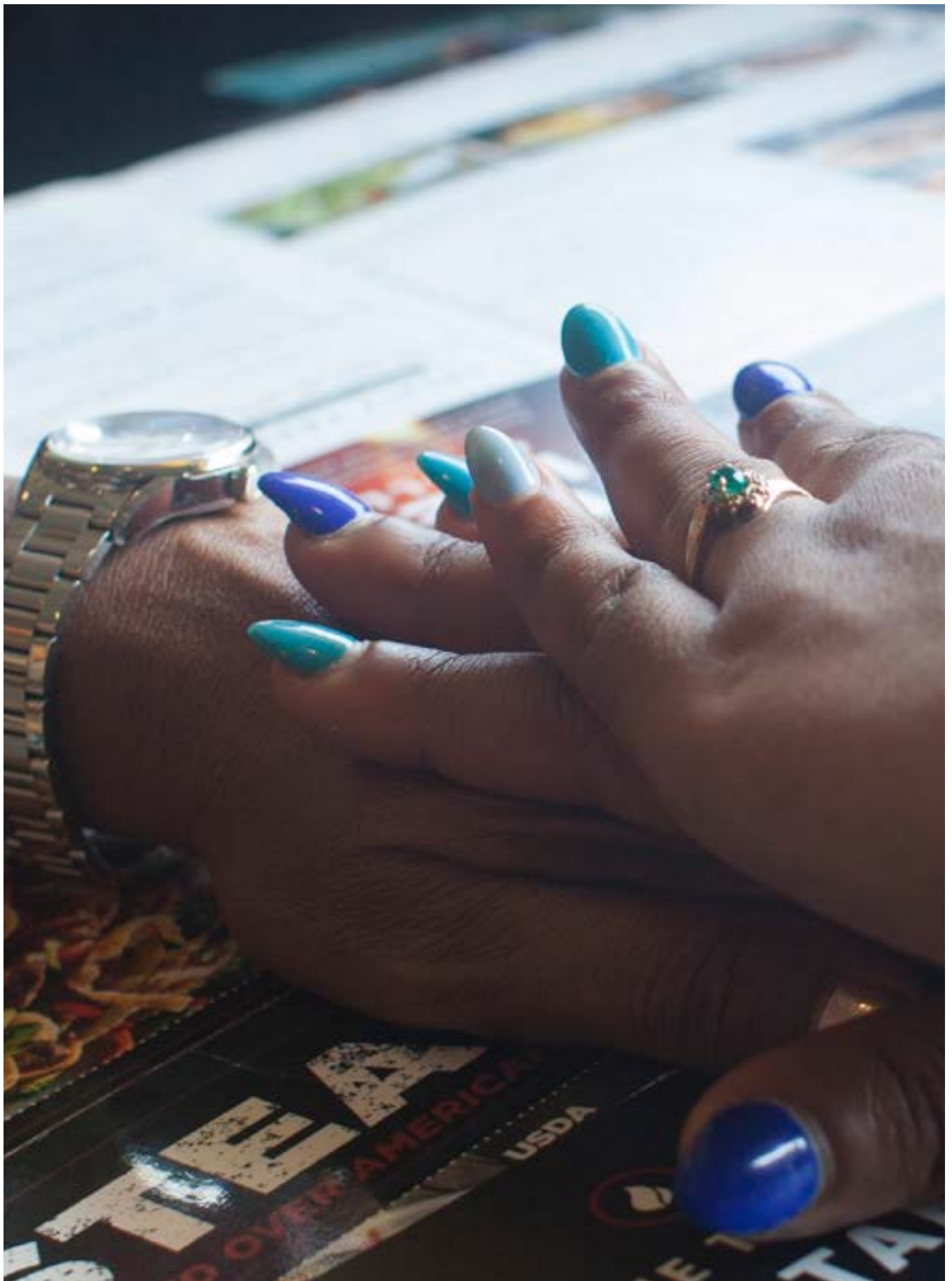
Then I tried it in sign language. I would point to my eyes for "I," then cross my arms like an X over my chest for "Love," then tickle her belly for "You."

BUILDING A BOND

Now Jaiya is 2 1/2 and I am still struggling with being a mother. These days, though, I don't feel as scared as I used to.

I haven't learned everything about being a parent, and I still have a black cloud that hangs over my head on many days. At the end of the day, I go over in my head what could have gone better, what I should have said or done, and so on. But then I get real and tell myself, "I'm wasting too much time on 'coulda, shoulda, woulda' instead of living in the moment. I have to enjoy what I do have, or the moments are gone."

When my daughter seemed agitated or restless, I would try singing and she seemed to quiet down to listen to me. It was a sweet feeling. I thought, 'That's real love,' because I can't sing to save my life!



STORY INDEX

These stories were written by 'My Story, My Life,' participants:

THE PRICE OF PARENTING WHILE POOR

In Rise's issue about poverty, parents who grew up in foster care wrote about how financial pressure can impact parenting.

[Broke and Alone: It wasn't love that made me open the door to my daughter's unstable father](#)

[Trapped — I know what my son and I need but I can't afford it](#)

[Safe Inside — I'm helping my son feel secure despite difficult conditions](#)

[In Search of Security — When finding housing is a job in itself](#)

BROKEN BONDS

In Rise's issue about adoption, parents who grew up in foster care wrote about losing their children to adoption.

[Heartbroken—My child was allowed to choose adoption at 9](#)

[KinGap allows me to still be Mommy-- I'm signing over guardianship but I'm not giving up on my kids](#)

FACING AN INVESTIGATION

In Rise's issue on investigations, parents who grew up in care wrote about being investigated and the lifelong fear of investigations.

[Prepared for Parenting — After I gave birth, I had to prove I was a fit mother](#)

['They Will Not Win' — I had to overcome my hopelessness to fight the false allegations against me](#)

[The Fear Stays With Me — Living my life right hasn't made me feel safe from an investigation](#)

HEALING TOGETHER

In Rise's special issue on parent-child therapy, parents who grew up in care described how it benefitted them.

['It Helps You Create That Special Bond' — Two mothers explain how parent-child therapy helped them](#)

[Starting Strong — Parent-child therapy helps parents and children build a lasting bond](#)

[Seen and Heard — I was able to listen to my son when I felt heard](#)

SOMEONE TO TURN TO

In Rise's issue on social support, parents who grew up in care described the many different places they found connection.

['I Needed Help That People in My Life Couldn't Give Me' — Through preventive services I've found ways to feel safe, calm and connected](#)

[Home Safe Home — I'm looking for supportive housing for my son and me](#)

[Family After Foster Care — I want my daughter to have the love and security I finally found](#)

[Trying Again — This time, I have the support to face my feelings](#)

[Safe and Loved — I began to heal when I stopped carrying the burden of sexual abuse in silence](#)

WHAT IT TAKES

In Rise's second issue in its series dedicated to parents who grew up in foster care, parents wrote about the supports and services that helped them break the intergenerational cycle of foster care placement. Also listed are interviews about supporting parents who grew up in care.

['I Was Her Little Flower That Was Blossoming' — Mentors and peers helped me find my way back to hope](#)

[Dreaming Again — Parenting Journey, therapy and writing are helping me believe in myself](#)

['We Want to Be Heard, Not Fixed' — Child welfare needs to focus on supporting people, not fixing problems](#)

[Awakening to Magic — In addition to services, times of joy, connection and wonder keep me going](#)

[On My Own Terms — I needed to feel safe and in control to face my past](#)

[Joining the System — Parent advocates who have been both child and parent of the system are a powerful resource to improve it](#)

[Finding a Community](#)

[Making It Safe to Ask for Help — How can child welfare support more and investigate less?](#)

[Laying the Past to Rest — Calming your body's sensations can help to heal trauma.](#)

[Protecting Your Privacy — How to work with your lawyer to keep therapy as confidential as possible](#)

[Do No Harm — Trauma-focused courts address the roots of foster care placement](#)

GENERATIONS IN FOSTER CARE

In Rise's first issue in its series dedicated to parents who grew up in foster care, parents wrote about the painful relationship between parents and the systems that raised them. Also listed are interviews about changing the relationship between these parents and the system.

[Fight and Flight – Will my family ever be safe from child welfare's reach?](#)

[Everything Felt Like Nothing – I ran from my feelings and I didn't know how to stop](#)

['When Someone Takes Care of Us, It's Easier For Us to Take Care of Our Children' – Recommendations from young mothers who grew up in foster care](#)

[Support Without Judgment – I didn't want to get services from a system set up to judge me](#)

[From Enemy to Ally: Because my caseworker accepted me, I was able to believe in myself](#)

['I Made a Mistake' Not 'I Am a Mistake' – How parents—and the child welfare system—can stand up to shame](#)

['I Can See His Happiness Just By Watching Him' – My foster parents showed my son and me how to feel safe](#)

[Acknowledged – It helped me heal when child welfare officials said, 'I'm sorry.'](#)

[A Responsibility to Support – Improving how child welfare systems respond to mothers who grew up in their care](#)

[Reducing the Risk – Mothers in foster care need to know what's in their case file and address risks](#)

[Mothering the Mother – How foster parents and staff can strengthen mother-child bonds](#)

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON PARENTING

In this issue parents who grew up in care reflected on how pain from their past has affected their parenting, and how they have worked to heal. Included are interviews about trauma and parenting.

[Small Steps – I want to give my kids the childhood I didn't have](#)

[From Existing to Living – I needed courage and support to face my childhood and reconnect with my kids](#)

[Too Close for Comfort – I was afraid to show my daughter all the love I really felt](#)

[There Is Always a Way Forward – Therapy showed me I could build a better future for myself and my children](#)

[The Heart of the Problem – Child welfare systems are beginning to recognize—and treat—parents' trauma](#)

[A Family That Heals Together – Child-parent therapy can help parents and children recover from trauma](#)

[To Speak or Not to Speak – Weighing the pros and cons of revealing past trauma in court.](#)

YOUR LAWYER AND YOU

In Rise's issue on parent attorneys, parents who grew up in care wrote about returning to the system as respondent parents.

[Coerced In Court – I wish I'd never let the court find me guilty of neglect](#)

[In My Corner – My lawyer believed in me even when my family didn't](#)

ADDITIONAL STORIES

[Taking No Chances- I feared that my daughter would be taken from me if I stayed in foster care.](#)

[No More Chances- After my last relapse, I couldn't get my children back](#)

[Shock and Awe- My daughter's first year was so hard for me](#)

PARENT-TO-PARENT GUIDANCE

Below are stories previously published in Rise by parents who grew up in foster care about supports and services that helped them, or about steps they took to manage phases of child welfare involvement. You can use these stories to inform other parents about services.

[Safe Inside – I'm helping my son feel secure despite difficult conditions](#)

[KinGap allows me to still be Mommy-- I'm signing over guardianship but I'm not giving up on my kids](#)

[Prepared for Parenting – After I gave birth, I had to prove I was a fit mother](#)

['They Will Not Win' – I had to overcome my hopelessness to fight the false allegations against me](#)

['It Helps You Create That Special Bond' – Two mothers explain how parent-child therapy helped them.](#)

[Starting Strong – Parent-child therapy helps parents and children build a lasting bond](#)

[Seen and Heard – I was able to listen to my son when I felt heard](#)

['I Was Her Little Flower That Was Blossoming' – Mentors and peers helped me find my way back to hope](#)

[Dreaming Again – Parenting Journey, therapy and writing are helping me believe in myself](#)

[Joining the System – Parent advocates who have been both child and parent of the system are a powerful resource to improve it](#)

[Finding a Community](#)

[Support Without Judgment – I didn't want to get services from a system set up to judge me](#)

112 W. 27th St. #607
New York, NY 10001
(646) 543-7099

risemagazine.org

