

**CORE**  
**TEEN**

Critical On-going Resource Family Education

# Right Time Training: Relationship Development

CORE TEEN CURRICULUM

# In Acknowledgement

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# CORE TEEN CURRICULUM: RIGHT TIME TRAINING

The CORE Teen Curriculum is comprised of three components: 1) Self-Assessment; 2) Classroom Training, and 3) Right Time Training. It was developed through a 3 year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. Project partners included Spaulding for Children; the ChildTrauma Academy; The Center for Adoption Support and Education; the North American Council on Adoptable Children; and the University of Washington.

The intent of the project was to develop a state-of-the-art training program to equip resource parents to meet the needs of older youth who have moderate to serious emotional and behavior health challenges who require intensive and coordinated services and may be at risk for more restrictive congregative care.





# RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW

“

The capacity to care, share, listen, value and be empathetic develops from being cared for, shared with, listened to, valued and nurtured.

~Dr. Bruce Perry

”

The purpose of this portion of the training is to enhance your learning around relationship development. In this program, relationship development is defined as the critical tasks and skills required to engage, increase commitment and positive connection, and develop a supportive healing relationship between foster caregivers and the youth in their homes.

Once you have completed this portion of the training program, you will:

- ▶ Understand how trust and safety are critical to relationship development
- ▶ Understand how parenting characteristics are related to relationship development
- ▶ Identify parenting strategies that support relationship development

Relational trauma occurs when one person betrays, abandons, or refuses to provide support for another person with whom he or she has developed an attachment bond. However, youth who have experienced relational trauma can be very complex individuals to be in a relationship with. Because vulnerability is such a part of many trauma survivors' lives, the family's ability to communicate and demonstrate safety is a central component to relationship building. The adolescent is more likely to open themselves up to a relationship if, repeatedly over time, there is little evidence of threat (whether physical, sexual or associated with criticism or judgment). Trust, though, does take time, and for some, it may take a very long period of time.

As you will learn throughout this segment, youth have their own work to do in growth and healing; your role is to consistently create the caregiving environment for them to feel safe enough to do their work. Tremendous parental insight and control is required to create that safe environment, and this portion of training will assist you on your journey of developing more insight into your own thoughts and feelings towards your child, and toward becoming a more intentional parent.

## PRE-VIDEO DISCUSSION

“

Trust is like a paper, once it's crumpled, it can't be perfect again.

~Unknown

”

When you have experienced trauma your ability to feel safe in the world around you is significantly impacted. Often times, the youth is in a high state of alert watching for any sign that may trigger a protective response so they can avoid emotional or physical pain. They are very sensitive to changes in schedules, transitions, surprises, chaotic social situations and, in general, any new situation. Because of this, being consistent, predictable, and repetitive will be very important in making the youth feel safe and secure. Once the youth gains a sense of security and safety, this will most likely lead to the youth trusting you and being able to build a relationship that includes acceptance of your caring and nurturing.

- ▶ Do you have specific concerns about developing a relationship with the youth? If so, what are they?
- ▶ Do you have any fears or anxieties about having a relationship with the youth in your home? If so, what are they? Why do they exist?
- ▶ Do you communicate messages of support to the youth when they express emotional pain or confusion?

In the first few weeks, you will need to give yourself and the youth time to get to know and observe each other. This will help both of you become more comfortable as you navigate your new relationship together. This is more important than worrying about enforcing every family rule or making sure homework is done every night.

- ▶ As you develop a relationship with the youth, how will you balance the needs of the youth with work, your partner, social life, other family and household needs?
- ▶ How will you make sure you don't put too much pressure on yourself or the youth?

While trust will eventually be a two-way street, in the beginning it is not. For the parent, it is more giving without receiving as you will hear in the video. In order to gain a youth's trust, parents will have to demonstrate a pattern of trustworthy behavior. Parents must anticipate and plan for building trust slowly over time and understand that it can be broken down easily.

- ▶ Why is it so hard to develop trust with a youth who has experienced trauma?
- ▶ Are you willing to parent a youth who may not trust you?



VIEW the Relationship Development Right Time Episode

## POST VIDEO DISCUSSION

This video segment provided information on the critical impact responsive caregiving can have on a child's growth and healing. You heard from experts about the impacts of trauma and how you have the ability, through a consistent, responsive relationship with your child, to alter those impacts. You also heard from parents who validated the challenges, but also spoke of the importance of remaining committed to the youth. Young adults who were previously in the foster care system, emphasized the need for your commitment and validation; never giving up on them and recognizing the behavior is not who they are; they are so much more.

You heard about four habits that will help you build trust with your youth: Being Present, Attentiveness, Attunement, and Responsiveness. Commitment is what solidifies the relationship with your youth.

- When it comes to “Being Present”, why is being parallel, patient and persistent so important?

You also heard about something called “serve and return”.

- How challenging do you think it might be to constantly “serve” without getting a “return”?

You heard one parent talk about how important it is to develop parenting goals. She described that she parented for “relationship only”.

- What are your parenting goals?
- Are your parenting goals likely to interfere with the development of a relationship with your youth?

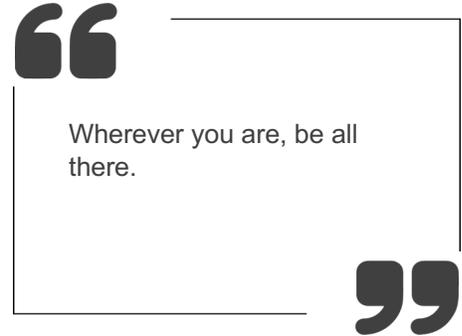
Please discuss with your viewing partner (parenting partner, family member, caseworker, etc.) what information was presented to you that was new, or that resonated with you regarding the impacts of relational trauma on children, noting any realizations you may have had while viewing the information.



# RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

A variety of skills were introduced within this video segment related to relationship development. Please discuss what you recall about each of these skills with your viewing partner.

- ▶ Being Present – Remember, it's not about you! One of the most precious gifts you can give another is the gift of your full and complete attention. However, listening attentively without the need to respond, interrupt, or comment is a skill that takes considerable practice to master.
- ▶ Being Parallel – What were you doing the last time you had a good conversation with your child? Most likely: walking or driving to school, baking together, shooting hoops or playing other games, or dining out. These times and activities loosen tongues because parent and child are engaged in something more than the conversation and the stress of eye contact and intimacy are lessened. This is being in parallel position.
- ▶ Being Persistent – Don't give up. Success comes from persistence. Developing, repairing, and maintaining trust needed for relationship development is an ongoing process of renegotiation, making and learning from mistakes, and personal growth.
- ▶ Being Positive – Stay positive by committing to regulate your own emotions; prioritizing and strengthening the parent-child connection and loving the teen unconditionally.
- ▶ Being Quiet – Listen more than talk. Don't interrupt and don't presume you know more than the youth. They have had unique experiences, so listen with intent and curiosity.
- ▶ Being Patient – Start the relationship slowly. Begin by getting to know the person. Start where the youth is, consider what their emotional and social age is, rather than just relying on how old they are in years. Make certain your expectations are developmentally appropriate.
- ▶ Being Playful – Remember to do fun things with the youth. At times we can get caught up in all of the negative and forget the youth has many interests, talents, and strengths. Doing fun activities may also support parallel communication and allow both you and the youth to find joy in your relationship.



-Jim Elliot

Which of the above skills do you believe you need to improve upon?

## ACTIVE LISTENING

- ▶ **Be Compassionate.** Put yourself in the youth's shoes to help you understand what they are saying and how they feel.
- ▶ **Be Attentive.** Make an effort to listen carefully. Don't daydream or talk when someone else is talking.
- ▶ **Give Space.** Be aware of how close you are to the youth when you are speaking.
- ▶ **Be Parallel.** Try to not look directly at the youth but be present and responsive to your child so she knows she's being heard and understood.
- ▶ **Be aware of your body language and nonverbal behaviors.**
  - Tone of voice
  - Facial expressions
  - Gestures
  - Posture
- ▶ **Don't interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions.** Be careful to leave out your personal emotions, disagreements, opinions, and other feedback.
- ▶ **Remain unbiased.** Don't take sides or stake your own claims.
- ▶ **Limit your open-ended questions.** Only ask clarifying questions when the youth is done talking. Be polite and respectful. For example, ask "Can you say more about that?" or "What did you mean when you said...?"

“

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.

”

~Bryant H. McGill

# GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

If you are looking for an easy way to get to know each other, or just begin a relationship, consider starting a conversation using the following questions. Always follow the active listening guide; paying close attention to non-verbal cues. This will tell you when the youth or you need a break. Pace yourself, there is no need to address all of these questions immediately or in one sitting.

- ▶ My favorite food is:
- ▶ My favorite game is:
- ▶ Activities I like to participate in include (clubs, sports, youth groups, etc.):
- ▶ Things I like to watch on TV include:
- ▶ My favorite thing(s) to do on the weekend are:
- ▶ What I like to be called/Nickname is:
- ▶ When hanging out with friends, I like to:
- ▶ Things that make me laugh include:
- ▶ Holidays I like to celebrate include:
- ▶ To celebrate them, I like to:
- ▶ If I could visit one place on earth, it would be...I want to go there because...
- ▶ When I'm an adult, I want to be:
- ▶ Famous people I admire:
- ▶ Other information I would like to share:

Once you have developed a beginning relationship, you may want to consider the following questions. Remember, these may trigger emotions / reactions in the youth, so make certain you predict and plan how best to approach the conversation. You may also want to consider parallel conversation so it is not so intimidating / threatening to the youth. Make certain you are candid in your responses, modeling vulnerability.

- ▶ If I had three wishes, they would be:
- ▶ I am most proud of...
- ▶ The most important things I want people to know about me are:
- ▶ If I could change one thing, it would be:
- ▶ What makes you feel safe?
- ▶ What does trust mean to you?
- ▶ What does family mean to you?
- ▶ What helps me most when I am feeling sad, upset, angry, frustrated?
- ▶ What people do you feel closest to?
- ▶ What things do you worry about?
- ▶ What are your dreams for the future?
- ▶ How would you like to see our relationship? Is there anything you believe is going really well? What would you like to see us improve upon?
- ▶ What words would you use to describe this family? How does that differ from other experiences?
- ▶ What traditions / rituals have been important to you in the past? Would you like to see this family do some of those?
- ▶ Other information I would like to share:

# 10 WAYS TO KILL A CONVERSATION WITH A TEEN



1. Tell the youth that what they are thinking, feeling or saying is wrong. Say things like, “It’s silly to feel that way.” “There is nothing to be scared of” “Stop being a cry baby, toughen up”.
2. Ask them how they are feeling 50 times.
3. Ask them 5-7 questions when they walk through the door.
4. When the youth is excited and celebrating say things like ‘I don’t know why you’re so excited it’s only...’.
5. Use inappropriate eye contact. Get very close or stare intently for a very long time and don’t consider cultural differences.
6. Sit slouched over, look distracted, check your phone, drum your fingers on the table, or use some other body language to signal that you’re not really interested.
7. While the youth is speaking to you, start thinking about what you’re going to say in reply.
8. Be judgmental and challenging. Ask them things like “What were you thinking?” Put them on the spot “Your grades should be better.” “You shouldn’t have said that to her.” “How could you possibly think that?”
9. Interrupt often – don’t allow them to finish their sentences.
10. Give a lot of unsolicited advice.

## RESOURCES

These resources can provide some additional information that may help you explore Relationship Development further.

-  **Trauma, Brain, and Relationship: Helping Children Heal**  
This documentary features Bruce Perry, M.D.; Daniel Siegel, M.D.; Marti Glenn, PhD; Jeanne Segal, PhD; Bryan Post; and other renowned experts in the field of childhood trauma, and attachment and bonding. It summarizes our understanding of how trauma affects children's behaviors and social relationships.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYj7YYHmbQs>
-  **The Teenage Brain with Daniel Siegel**  
Daniel Siegel debunks myths about the Teenage Brain and "raging hormones". He discusses the changes and remodeling of the brain within the adolescent period. He asserts that people need to learn about these changes to support and meet adolescents with empathy and compassion.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLULtUPyhog&t=19s>
-  **Ten Ways to Show Your Foster Child Your Love**  
Strategies that you can use to show the child you are caring for how he or she is unique and special.  
<http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/ten-ways-show-foster-child-love/>
-  **Talking with Your Adopted Teen: It's Possible and Important**  
Provides practical tips for communicating with teens.  
<https://nacac.org/resource/talking-with-your-adopted-teen/>
-  **The Science of Parent-Child Relationships: Parental Openness Can Help Children Learn to Trust**  
Describes a brain-based caregiving approach to help parents stay open to untrusting children, embracing the whole child rather than shifting into defense.  
<https://nacac.org/resource/science-of-parent-child-relationships/>

# CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

Now, it is time to develop a plan to address those areas you would like to change. Consider the points / questions below, as well as your self-assessment and classroom material, when identifying three things you would like to do to improve your skills related to relationship building.

- ❖ Identify / define the specific issue or concern related to relationship building you would like to change.
  - ▶ If you completed the CORE Teen Self-Assessments, consider your results related to the characteristics that are essential to support relationship development (compassion, commitment, acceptance, attunement, sense of humor, and adaptability/flexibility).
  - ▶ You may also want to review the material that was presented in classroom Session 3: Developing and Sustaining a Healthy and Supportive Relationship with Your Youth.
- ❖ Consider what the “root” causes are for the difficulty in building a relationship with the youth
  - ▶ What are your triggers that result in you shutting down relationship building?
  - ▶ What are the youth’s triggers?
  - ▶ How does this relate to your level of comfort, confidence and ability?
- ❖ What barriers do you believe exist in creating a trusting relationship with your youth?
  - ▶ What strengths will you leverage, and what additional help will you need?
  - ▶ What behaviors or responses from the youth do you anticipate?

What three things am I going to do to improve my ability to build a relationship with the youth?

Action Step – what am I going to do differently?	When will I try it	What resources will help me	How will I know if it worked	Who will give me feedback
1.				
2.				
3.				