
Understanding Child Development and Managing Feelings

(Recommended for caregivers with children 3-11 years old)

“ALL CHILDREN ARE BORN TO GROW, TO DEVELOP, TO LIVE, TO LOVE, AND TO ARTICULATE THEIR NEEDS AND FEELINGS FOR THEIR SELF-PROTECTION.” ALICE MILLER

SESSION PARTICIPANTS: Foster-Adoptive Caregivers

SESSION TIME: 100 minutes

Objectives:

1. To set clear expectations for youth and be consistent with consequences
2. To be able to develop a firm, yet nurturing parenting style

Materials:

- Worksheet: [Child Development](#)
- Video: [Demonstration: Responding to behavioral problems](#)
- Video: [Demonstration: Dealing with a tantrum](#)
- Worksheet: [SNAP Problem-Solving Model](#)
- Video: [Discipline and Consequences](#)
- Video: [Do not take child reactions personally](#)
- Worksheet: [Feeling Thermometer](#)
- Worksheet: [Getting to Green](#)

Materials for the Participant’s Folder:

- Worksheet: Child Development
- Worksheet: SNAP Problem-Solving Model
- Worksheet: Feeling Thermometer
- Worksheet: Getting to Green
- Worksheet: [How to Hold a Family Meeting](#)

Introduction (10 minutes)

- General welcome and facilitator introductions
- Introduction of today's topic on child development and managing emotions
- If conducting in a group format, ask each member of the group to share the following:
 - Name
 - Children's ages
 - Are you fostering or adopting the children? If adopting, where you at in the process?
 - One parenting goal the group member has for today's session (Note: The facilitator should give a few minutes to think about the goal before asking them to share)

Skills of the Day: Setting Realistic Expectations Based on Age (30 minutes)

Say: Parenting foster children can be challenging at times. Foster children have experienced many transitions in their lives and need security, consistency, and nurturance. As foster or adoptive parents, your foster child's behaviors and reactions may be inconsistent with what you had imagined or incongruent with where they are at developmentally. Today we will talk about what stage your child is at developmentally and how you can tailor your expectations to meet your child where they are at.

- **Exercise 1: Worksheet: Child Development**

https://carescenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Growing-up-healthy-and-happy_all-ages_0.pdf

- *Say: Child development is the path of growing up and it involves learning and mastery of certain skills or tasks. We like to call these developmental milestones. I want you to take some time to explore the chart below to understand what milestones your child should reach and what you can do as a parent to help get them there.*
- *Say: We are now going to watch two videos that will help us understand child development and ways we can respond to the child in a developmentally appropriate manner.*

- **Exercise 2: Video: Demonstration: Responding to behavioral problems**

<https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=1121>

- *Say: Problem solving around difficult behavior and setting realistic expectations is an important part of creating a positive home environment.*

- **Exercise 3: Video Demonstration: Dealing with a tantrum**

<https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=1125>

- *Say: Communication and problem-solving are key skills related to dealing with a tantrum or other challenging behavior.*

- Ask: *Reflecting on both videos, what are your thoughts on how the parent(s) responded to Isabelle? How would you have responded to Isabelle when she was being defiant?*
- Say: *Remember Dr. Mogil's steps. Calm yourself down before you respond to your child. Let's use the SNAP worksheet to help problem solve ways to respond to your child's behavioral problems.*

- **Exercise 4: Worksheet: S.N.A.P. Problem-Solving Model**

https://nfrc.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/SNAPProblemSolving_0.pdf

- Say: *This is a great problem solving tool that requires us to utilize the skills we have learned (child's developmental milestones) as we consider what we will choose to do about a problem that we are trying to solve. As a foster parent, you will be creating a new family and there may be problems that may arise that can cause conflict in the home. We emphasize a team approach in solving problems as a way of not only bonding with your family, but making sure that every voice is heard. Please identify a current problem that is going on in your home. Examples could include child having difficulty cleaning their room or doing their homework in the evenings.*
 - We use the acronym **S.N.A.P.** to help us problem solve in four steps:
 - **S**tate the problem
 - **N**ame the goal (realistic and specific in one sentence)
 - **A**ll possible solutions (make a list of all the possible actions you could take; when done as a family encourage the caregiver to have options proposed by both the caregiver(s) and child. The goal here is to be creative, so even wacky solutions should be included in the list).
 - **P**ick the best one and try it out (evaluate the pros and cons of each options, reach a decision about which action you want to try, try it and review it)
 - Example of S.N.A.P.:
 - State the problem: Leaving toys out in the backyard
 - Name the goal: By the end of the week all the toys will be put away in the backyard
 - Actions:
 - Use a magic vacuum to scoop up all the toys
 - Put toys away after you play with them
 - The whole family helps clean up the toys in the backyard on Fridays and gets pizza as a reward
 - One person cleans the backyard every week
 - Buy storage bins and leave them in the backyard to remind us to clean up the toys
 - Pick the best one and try it out: The whole family helps clean up the toys in the backyard on Fridays and gets pizza as a reward
- Encourage the caregiver to share this tool with their family. Ask them how they feel about teaching it and how they think their child might respond.

- Encourage the caregiver to check out the FOCUS for Foster Families App and the game “Bear Necessities” as a great way to introduce problem solving to children.
- **Exercise 5: Video: Discipline and Consequences**

<https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=1114>

- Say: *Taking into consideration their developmental age, let’s watch this video from a therapist who works with foster youth on being consistent, firm, and predictable as parents*
- Description: Dr. Erin Dornan addresses setting up clear expectations for youth and being consistent when it comes to consequences
- Ask: *Dr. Erin Dornan emphasizes being firm, consistent, and predictable. What is a discipline or consequence you can set in your home that embodies those three qualities?*

Understanding the underlying emotions that shape behaviors (30 minutes)

Say: *Now that we have a better understanding of where your child is at developmentally, let’s take a look at ways we can better understand his or her emotions and cognitions. First, it’s important to remember that it is normal for foster children to have behavioral problems due to the transitions and the trauma they have experienced. Behaviors are shaped by thoughts and feeling and we will focus on better understanding the underlying feelings/emotions that shape these behaviors. We have created a tool to help put words to both you and your child’s feelings. This is a helpful tool for families to communicate their feelings to each other.*

- **Exercise 6: Video: Do not take child reactions personally**

<https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=1116>

- Kids may have negative reactions to the adjustment of living in a new home. This video with Dr. Audra Langley of TIES for Families will help us understand that child’s feelings/behaviors are not to be taken personally, but instead understood. The tools below will help you understand your child’s reactions to things.
 - **Exercise 7: Worksheet: Feeling Thermometer**
- https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/pluginfile.php/2443/mod_folder/content/0/FeelingThermometer.pdf
- Say: *The Feeling Thermometer helps you communicate and track your feelings each day. It measures feelings on a scale of comfortable (green) to uncomfortable (red). Using the thermometer, you can measure the intensity of your feelings and note how different intensities affect you.*
 - Ask: *Using the Feeling Thermometer, where are you at on it right now?*
 - Ask: *How do you know when you are moving up the Feeling Thermometer?*
 - Discuss how the Feeling Thermometer relates to the caregivers’ children. Ask: *What are cues that your child gives you when they are moving up the Feeling Thermometer (green to orange)?*

- Ask: *As a parent, your emotional state has a big impact on your children. How do you bring yourself down the Feeling Thermometer? How do your foster children come down the Feeling Thermometer?*
- **Exercise 8: Worksheet: Getting to Green**
https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/pluginfile.php/2443/mod_folder/content/0/GettingtoGreen.pdf
 - Say: *“Green” is the place where you feel comfortable, relaxed, calm, and at peace. There are a lot of ways on this list to get to green.*
 - Ask: *Please circle ways you and your child can get to the green together or individually. How can you support each other to get to the green?*
 - Ask: *What are ways you can “get to the green” in your family that is not included on this list?*

Finding a place to talk about feelings (20 minutes)

Say: *Family meetings are a great opportunity for open communication among family members. They are also a perfect time to discuss upcoming events, address conflicts, or clarify expectations for youth. The worksheet below summarizes how ensure your family meeting goes smoothly. Bring the Feeling Thermometer and introduce it to your children at the next family meeting. Let them know this is going to be a new activity where everyone can express where they are at on the thermometer every day!*

- **Exercise 9: Worksheet: How to Hold a Family Meeting**
https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/pluginfile.php/2443/mod_folder/content/0/Howtoholdafamilymeeting.pdf
- **Exercise 9: Video: How to Hold a Family Meeting:**
<https://learn.dpbh.ucla.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=1123>
 - Optional: view *How to Hold a Family meeting video*
 - Ask: *Where is a place you can hold this family meeting?*
 - Ask: *Considering the information that we covered today, what would be a topic that you could discuss at the family meeting?*
 - Examples include: Feeling Thermometer, getting to the green examples
 - Ask: *What your thoughts on sharing the Feeling thermometer with your child(ren)? What are ways you could teach it to your child? What are ways you could teach the getting to the green strategies during the family meeting?*
 - Ask: *Considering the developmental stage your child is at, what are family meeting ground rules you can establish at the beginning of the meeting?*
 - Examples include: Listening to others, being respectful of what each person has to say, etc.



Wrap Up (10 minutes)

- Remind the caregiver of the key takeaways of this session:
 - Foster children have experienced many transitions in their lives and need security, consistency, and nurturance.
 - As foster or adoptive parents, your foster child's behaviors and reactions may be inconsistent with what you had imagined or incongruent with where they are at developmentally.
 - It is important for foster parents to meet their child where they are at developmentally; a child's chronological age may not match their developmental age
 - In order to develop a firm yet nurturing parenting style, we need to understand our children's behaviors and emotions. The Feeling Thermometer is a great way to be able to talk about emotions at home.
 - Utilize the Feeling Thermometer, Getting to the Green, and How to Hold a Family Meeting to help set up family rules and strengthen your parenting skills
- Ask the caregiver to set and share a parenting goal to practice during the next week
- Ask the caregiver to discuss one thing they will take away from today's session