

School Prep: Be a Buddy Booster!

With the end of summer in sight, it is time to gear up for a new school year. Intense energy is spent on finding the correct school supplies, the right outfit for the first day, filling out enrollment paperwork, and attending schedule pickups, classroom drop-ins, etc. If your child requires educational assistance, it means spending extra time and effort to establish a positive relationship with the new teacher(s) and communicating your child's specific learning needs. It may also be a time when children are leaving behind former friends and working to make new ones, which is more often the case for children in foster care. With so many other preparations, helping our kids in this area can be easily overlooked or simply taken for granted. Can't we simply tell them to go introduce themselves and leave it at that?

The answer here is yes, and no. Some children seem to be wired as social butterflies. Others need far more explicit instruction. For children with a history of trauma, the lack of secure early attachments often leads to more anxious and controlling behaviors in later relationships. They may have had rough, unsupervised interactions with siblings and peers before they came into care. Other challenges include delayed social and emotional development, and difficulty with self-regulation. A combination of genetics and a lack of proper social coaching often leaves them behind others when it comes to making and keeping friends.



As we all know, friendships are beneficial to children. They help to boost a child's social competence, self-esteem, and confidence. Having good friends allows for children to share both fun times and difficult times. Another highly important reason is that having friends helps shelter children from bullying. All of us want these good things for our children. How can we help them navigate this difficult terrain?

Research in this area has revealed some solid science behind the art of making and keeping friends. It involves three main areas of work: helping kids improve self-regulation skills, modeling and teaching unwritten social rules, and finding sources of friendship based on common interests. Parents can be invaluable sources of support and information for kids in this area. Self-regulation is an area where we can all improve. As parents, one of the best ways to help our children is to work on regulating ourselves! When things get out of control, taking a moment to check in with ourselves can be invaluable. Practice strategies for self-regulation with your child when he or she is calm, so your child can access them when things get tough.

While continuing to work on self-regulation strategies, parents can become detectives of their children's social patterns. What unspoken rules do they need some help with? Focus on one area at a time and look for opportunities to model the appropriate behavior. Point it out when you see it modeled in others (television shows can be a good source for social coaching!) Praise them specifically for the positive behaviors they exhibit and ask if they see areas where they could improve.



In addition to helping children with these skills, it is important to find activities that your child enjoys. Not only does this bring out his or her personal best, involving your child in groups with shared interests provides better potential for new friends. Screen new groups to make certain that they welcome children with developmental differences and that parents are welcome to assist with supervision. Consider placing your child in activities where he or she is at the top of the age range to maximize the possibility of forming friendships with younger children who may better reflect his or her maturity level. As they start

to consider becoming friends with others in the group, talk with them about what makes a good friend and encourage them to spend time with others who display kindness and empathy. Children with low self-worth tend to gravitate toward others who may not treat them well, and may feel that they deserve poor treatment, so be sure to check in and process these issues. Talking with teachers or activity leaders to inquire about children who may be better possible sources of friendship is an option too.

Children cannot be expected to play in a more mature way than where they are at developmentally, but if allowed to play at their current level, progress is possible. For some children, this means that parallel play (i.e. drawing or making artwork while sitting next to a friend who is doing something similar) is most comfortable, and children can be eased into cooperative settings. Simple non-competitive games that require turn taking are ideal as a next step.

When planning a get together, think through how to set the environment for success. Maybe this means putting away special items or thinking through various activity options in advance. Provide your child the opportunity to talk through and practice being a good host or hostess. Staying within line of sight is necessary due to historical factors, but depending on your child's age and development, it may be important to think about how to do this without hovering too much, too.

As a parent, it can be difficult to find multiple sources of friendship, but it is well worth the effort. Keeping in touch with old, loyal friends is the gold standard, but not always possible. The extra work to maintain friendships from various sources helps prepare for times when friendships in one setting or another face difficulty. For example, if your child has a meltdown at school that costs them friends, he or she can take solace with a friend or two from the community art center, youth group, or scout troop while laying low to repair the damage.

A strength about friendships made through difficulty is that these friends tend to be loyal. And although having multiple friendships seems ideal, one or two good friends are a strong protective factor for your child's mental and emotional health. Ultimately, your support, unconditional love, and positive feedback are most important.

Building Advocacy Skills for Parents

A common challenge for parents is to know how to appropriately advocate for their child. Parents can struggle with the idea that if they help their child too much, he or she may not learn to make their way in the world. When dealing with younger children, it is less of an issue, but we may chafe to advocate when the child starts to get older. For parents who are caring for children with trauma histories, we need to remind ourselves that emotionally, socially, and psychologically, our 15-year-old is much younger. We probably need to step to the advocacy plate more frequently than for children who are developmentally typical. Let us review some of the components needed to be an advocate that gets results.

Be Informed - First and foremost, it is essential that you are well informed. You must view your child's strengths and their challenges with objectivity. Ask yourself if you are seeing your child without bias. This can be a tough task since many parents want to look at their child in the most positive light. However, if our child has tested our parenting skills to the limit, we may tend to catastrophize every negative or less than functional behavior. This latter inclination is one

that we must guard against with vigilance. If you have doubts about your view of your child, consider some input from individuals that know the child and can give you other perspectives of your child's skills and attributes.

Remain Organized - Next, you must remain organized. This means that paperwork must be kept in an orderly fashion and categorized for easy access. Make sure you have the results of assessments, copies of doctor's orders and health assessments, school reports, letters of contact and names of individuals that you have had dealings with. Keep everything in one place, such as a binder; it is transportable, and documents can easily be copied. Others prefer storing such information on a computer; digitized files need to be maintained and backed up.

Build Relationships - Building relationships is a must. In school settings, it is recommended that you have face time with staff. This can be done through volunteering for different school activities or sitting on the PTO. Allowing yourself to be seen outside of the context of the sometimes stressful, twice yearly parent-teacher conferences builds relationship equity. Remember to model respect and practice perspective taking. Teachers can have a tough job maintaining individualized plans for several children in a classroom with 20 other students!

Ask Questions - Questions are important. If you do not understand something, ask, and if the explanation is not clear, ask for clarification. Learn the lingo; almost every profession has an esoteric language and verbal shortcuts that can be confusing. Remaining calm and collected is sometimes easier said than done, particularly when we are discussing issues that can impact our child's future. It may help to bring along a friend that can be a source of moral support. Make a list of items or points that you want to cover so that you are not left searching the depths of your memory for that last item. Never forget that as the parent, you are a part of your child's team and are probably their most vested advocate.



Know Your Child's Rights - It is essential that you understand your child's rights and what your rights as a parent are; this becomes more difficult when a child is approaching the age of 18. You may need to look into the issue of getting power of attorney or guardianship so that you may still act on your child's behalf; speak with an attorney for specifics on this issue.

Communicate - Sometimes we get so caught up in what we think the child needs that we fail to talk with the child. What would they like? Where do they need help? Do they want to attempt to navigate something on their own, with the understanding that you can be there to back them up if they ask for it? Collaborative decision making or problem solving can go a long way in strengthening the parent/child relationship. Children with trauma histories may fight assistance from a parent because it is viewed by the child as losing control over their lives.

And finally, communicating regularly with stakeholders in both times of trouble and when things are going smoothly will strengthen the relationships that are inevitable during your child's development. Avoid being the parent whose call is *always* a signal of trouble; all people get a boost when they hear unsolicited, positive comments. If you chose to have a phone conversation, use email to recap the points covered and send to the other person. This way you produce a paper trail that cannot be refuted.

Just like a muscle, advocacy skills need to be worked to get stronger. Advocating for your child is no different. Tending to these elements of good advocacy every time will put you in a position of confidence and competency when the need arises.



safer, healthier relationships
for children and families

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Our Vision

FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

Our Mission

FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

Visit familyforwardmo.org/publications to read LifeLines online.

Educational Opportunities for Adoptive and Foster Parents

Each session counts as training toward your licensure requirement. Sessions are provided at low or no cost to all foster and adoptive parents. Registration is required.

Please note that all classes are for adults only. Children are not permitted in the classroom as training content is often not appropriate for them. Please arrange for childcare in your home as children cannot be left unattended in the lobby or hallways of the building. Thank you for helping keep your children safe.

Stop Bullying Now!

Thursday: July 12, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Parents gain an understanding of why a child bullies, signs of a child being a victim of a bully and intervention approaches within the community and school setting. Content is based on the national program, Stop Bullying Now!

School Issues

Wednesdays: July 25 and August 1, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Many children with a history of abuse, neglect, or other trauma struggle in school. Whether it is a learning disability, a developmental delay, or an emotional issue, children will often find the academic and social demands of the school environment to be a challenge. Parents discuss a variety of challenges, ways to ease the transition for children as they begin a new school year, and ways to communicate effectively with school personnel.

Crisis Management

Thursday, July 26, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Parents will learn what qualifies as a crisis, the signs of escalation in their children and methods to de-escalate the dysregulated child. The development and use of safety plans for the home will be discussed. Police CIT (Crisis Intervention Teams) and protocol for engaging their assistance will be introduced.

Impact of Trauma on Classroom Behavior

Monday, July 30, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

This class reviews the impact of trauma on a child's development and how it relates and manifests within the school setting. Practical tips for providing a trauma sensitive environment are covered. Parents are encouraged to invite their child's teachers to attend.

Introducing! Movies on Monday

Mondays: August 6, 13, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Monday, August 6, 2018 | Depression: Out of the Shadows

This 90-minute film tells the dramatic stories of people of all ages and backgrounds who suffer from depression. The film will be used as a springboard for further discussion about depression in children and youth: signs and symptoms of depression or suicidality and when to seek outside intervention.

Monday, August 13, 2018 | Paper Tigers

This film explores the transformative journey of a high school and its students as the stakeholders all become aware of how early trauma effects the way they respond to the world and others. Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE scores and how they can inform and empower those who are affected by trauma will be explored. With knowledge and nurture change is possible!

Trauma 101

Thursday, August 9, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

When a child is abused or neglected, it can affect every aspect of the child's development: physical, emotional, social, psychological. Discussion focuses on the reasons for delays and challenges based on the neurobiology of brain development. This course covers the mandatory articles required by all foster parents.

FamilyForward Parenting KIDS (Kids In Difficult Situations)

Thursdays: August 30, September 6, 13, 20, 27, October 4, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Children with histories of abuse and neglect tend to exhibit very difficult behaviors such as chronic lying, stealing, aggression, difficulties with eating and/or sleeping. Trauma-focused parenting is discussed with an emphasis on the impact of trauma on brain development. Insuring a child's physical, emotional, and psychological safety is paramount to decreasing behavioral issues and "re-wiring" the brain for appropriate behavioral responses. The NCTSN curriculum is utilized and supported with additional material/videos from professionals in the field of developmental trauma. 18 hours of class time is covered in six consecutive weeks. This is one of FamilyForward's most popular classes and can be a game changer for parents.

Ready, Set, Fly!

Tuesdays, September 4, 11, and 18, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

This training focuses on the unique issues involved with preparing adolescents to live on their own. It is mandatory training for any foster parent interested in providing for teens and is based on the curriculum of the Casey Foundation. Parents will utilize the Casey Life Skills Assessment to plot a collaborative plan of action for adolescents. 9 Hours.

Executive Function

Monday, September 10, 2018

6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Many children have difficulty with organizing, planning, goal setting, time management, and retaining things in their memory. What looks like defiance and laziness in the child may reflect a deficiency in the executive skills. Parents will learn how to help their child function better in the home setting utilizing common practices used by classroom teachers.

To register for training, contact Gail
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Our calendar of trainings can
now be viewed ONLINE!
familyforwardmo.org/events
(All classes are still held at our
Creve Coeur location) 