

PRE-FINALIZATION ADOPTION SERVICES

Trauma-Informed Parenting Strategies

Tracking Behaviors

For children who have experienced trauma, certain events, smells, places, sounds, things, etc. can be perceived as a threat and trigger a trauma response. It is important for parents to take time to review and debrief when their child is triggered. Collecting information such as where was the child, what was he doing, what preceded the episode, what could have been the trigger, who was there, how did the child act, what calmed him, how long did it take to calm down, can lead to critical insights for the parents and child. If the parents are able to do this on a consistent basis, they may be able to identify patterns and avoid, prevent, or be prepared to manage the child's trauma trigger.

Maintaining Consistency and Predictability

For children who have been traumatized, consistency is critical. It means being predictable by having rules, expectations and schedules that are fair and provides the child with a sense of calm with much less anxiety. The quicker a parent can establish a feeling of consistency and predictability for the child, the faster a child will feel safe and secure in the environment. There will be times that schedule or plans need to be flexible. Preparing the child ahead will help in these situations.

Talking about Safety

There is "physical" safety such as keeping sharp things away from children, using seat belts, locking doors at night, which we provide to children. *"Psychological" safety is the child's belief that "my needs will be met and no harm will come to me."* Some examples of this are regular meals, fair discipline without hitting, respect for child's feelings, nightlights, bedtime routines that promote a sense of security, etc. Having talks with the child about psychological safety can also help. Here's how it works:

1. Parent finds a moment when child has time and can really listen.
2. Parent helps child understand the difference between physical (being safe) and psychological safety (feeling safe) by giving examples of each.
3. Parent asks child if there is anything s/he can do to help the child feel safe.
4. Parent should be patient, be prepared to wait and be comfortable with silence.
5. Parent offers to talk more later when the child thinks of something or is afraid.

Staying Regulated

This strategy is particularly helpful when a child is having a meltdown. Here are the steps parents need to employ:

1. Respond quickly and with understanding
2. Help label the feeling, use good eye contact and keep your body close to the child
3. Help child to “scale” or describe the intensity of her feelings, using “green” for calm and relaxed, “yellow” for starting to get worried or upset, and “red” for very intense feelings
4. Set limits (No hitting or no throwing things)
5. Use few words, a firm tone and offer choices

Once the child is completely calm, the parent should debrief with the child discussing a more appropriate response in the future and practicing the new behavior

Pre-Teaching

Used in new or challenging situations, pre-teaching is a strategy that provides detailed information about a new situation or about parental expectations of children in a given situation. Pre-teaching is especially helpful when it assists a child figure out how to manage a transition or when the parent isn't sure how the child will respond in a given situation. Pre-teaching reduces the child's worries and lets the child know what you expect. Parents should not pile on too many expectations!

Here's how it works:

1. Keep words and tone simple and positive
2. Think ahead about what might sidetrack this child in this particular situation
3. Describe what you expect from the child briefly and clearly
4. Ask if the child has any questions

Here's an example: Mom pulls into the parking spot at the grocery store and turns off the car. Says to child, “Now we have to get in and out of the store quickly so we can get home to make dinner. We only need to get five things today. I need you to help me by staying with the cart and help me get the five items. Do you have any questions? Can you help me today?”