

Creating a Trauma-informed Environment in Your Foster Home

The Dramatic Shift of Being Placed in a Foster Home

When a child or youth in foster care is placed in your home, their world has likely turned upside down. They're separated from their family members. They no longer have their bedroom with all their personal items. They're split from their pets, friends and neighbors. Many times, they're also separated from their teachers and classmates. They may have put their clothes and whatever else that they could fit into a garbage bag and suddenly leave the world they've known all their lives.

So, although being placed in your care helps ensure their safety and well-being, moving into a new home can be a traumatizing experience filled with grief, loss and anxiety. Understanding your child or youth in foster care's perspective and honoring their voice and choice can help them adjust to their new surroundings and find their place in your home.

The Impact of Trauma on a Child or Youth in Foster Care

Your child or youth in foster care experienced traumatic events before they came to your home. These events may have profoundly impacted how their brain perceives and responds to the world. They most likely feel on edge, afraid, angry or all these emotions and more. Because of their traumatic experiences, your child or youth in foster care may not feel safe in your home. Here are some scenarios that may happen in your home as a result of their traumatic experiences.

- The child or youth may have been chronically hungry and not trust you will provide food for them. This may result in hoarding food in their bedroom to protect them from being hungry.
- The child or youth may have experienced sexual abuse and may need to change the placement of their bedroom furniture to feel safer.
- The child or youth most likely misses their birth family and may need their family pictures and mementos prominently placed in your home.

Partnering with Your Child or Youth in Foster Care to Create Their Home

Your child or youth in Foster Care didn't have a say in where they would live or who they would live with. To help them transition into living in your home, you must partner with them and give them as much voice and choice as possible. This will help them become comfortable in your home and reduce the effects of trauma they've experienced. Here are some ways for you to work with your child or youth in foster care to make your home their home.

1. Walk through your home with the child or youth and ask them for suggested changes that can help them feel safer.
2. Create a plan with the child or youth that identifies needed changes, who will make the changes and when they will be completed.
3. Created a safety plan with the child or youth that identifies the steps they can take when they don't feel safe.
4. Include the child or youth in making these changes, if they are interested and able to participate.

What You Can Do

Here are more general tips you can use to help your child or youth in foster care adjust to living in your home:

1. **Identify trauma activations.** Items in your home that may seem harmless to you may cause the child or youth to feel anxious or to act out. Help the child or youth identify the items that remind them of their trauma and develop ways to avoid them or work through them.
2. **Be emotionally and physically available.** The child or youth in foster care may act in ways you do not understand. Provide comfort and encouragement and listen for what the child or youth says about what they react to in your home.
3. **Allow control.** Whenever possible, offer reasonable, age-appropriate choices about the child or youth in foster care's personal and physical space that can give them a sense of control.

Resources

7 Strategies for Foster Parents | CPI. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/April-2016/7-Strategies-for-Foster-Parents>

Crisis Planning Tools for Families: A Companion Guide for Providers. Retrieved from https://www.masspartnership.com/pdf/Crisis-Planning-Tools_Guide_for_ProvidersFinal.pdf.

Make Your Home Trauma-informed | Cornerstones of Care Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.cornerstonesofcare.org/Blog/2019/04/08/3-Ways-to-Make-Your-Home-Trauma-Informed>

Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma. (2014). Children's Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/child-trauma.pdf>.