

Stress Relief Strategies

- **Try not to take your child's problems too personally.**
You are not the cause of the child's problems. Your child's history of abuse, neglect, institutionalization, and separations has created trauma from which he will need to heal. Though you did not create the trauma, you will be a place of healing for your child as he recovers.
- **Maintain a sense of humor.**
Connecting with other foster parents can help you find some comic relief in foster family life.
- **Stop comparing yourself to other families.**
You are comparing your "insides" with other people's "outsides."
- **Find a foster-competent family therapist.**
Your family needs a therapist who understands trauma and also knows typical stages of foster family adjustment.
- **Stay regulated. Reflect on your own thoughts, feelings, and intentions and those of your child. Don't jump into the child's fear.**
Your child is counting on you to be a port in the storm when she feels out of control. Heather Forbes, a therapist and adoptive mother, directs parents to "Stop, Drop, and Roll." (Stop talking. Drop into your breathing. Roll back into your relationship with your child.)
- **Find outlets for your own emotional, spiritual, and physical needs.**
Design opportunities to enjoy those activities.
- **Do a role check.**
Is one parent carrying most of the load? Occasionally, one parent over-functions as the nurturing parent or disciplinarian. In these situations, one parent does not allow his or her partner to participate fully in the parenting role. One helpful technique to address this difficulty is to explore and list which parenting tasks each parent can do very well and which parenting tasks are problematic or disastrous for each parent. The parents can then redistribute parenting tasks evenly.
- **Identify who owns the problem.**
The people who own the problem are in charge of solving it. If it isn't your problem, don't try to control it.
- **Take a break – find respite care.**
Re-charge your batteries with some time away from the challenge.
- **Remember the child's progress will not always be consistent.**
Growth is not always linear but can happen in fits and starts. Children who have learned to distrust adults need significant time to trust and attach.

- **Look for patterns in your child's behavior.**
If you understand her triggers, you may be able to prevent an explosion, or lessen the intensity significantly.
- **Use family meetings creatively.**
Family meetings are good opportunities to teach children about planning, problem solving, and decision-making.
- **Find ways to have fun with your child.**
Increase your positive interactions. Having fun builds attachment for both of you.
- **Reframe your definition of success and celebrate small gains.**
Keep your expectations for yourself and your child realistic. We sometimes sabotage ourselves with unrealistic expectations of the family's adjustment to fostering. Pay attention to the significant improvements you have made in your child's life situation and acknowledge the positive impact of your ongoing commitment to his effort to heal earlier wounds.
- **Join a foster parent support group.**

References:

Adapted with permission from Schooler, J.E., Keefer Smalley, B., Callahan, T.J., (2010). *Wounded children, healing homes*. Colorado Springs, CO. NavPress.