

Ep. 4 How to Listen, Empathize and Reassure: Early Days of Reintegration Frequently Asked Questions

How can I help prepare the family for what the child might experience as a result of the impact of trauma?

A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat or perceived threat to a child's life or safety. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens the life or physical security of a family member can also be traumatic. Traumatic experiences can lead to strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event.

Traumatic events include child abuse or neglect, family violence, and sudden loss of a loved one. In fact, living apart from their family is traumatic for many children. This trauma often leads to behavior issues such as nightmares, bedwetting, tantrums, talking back, etc.

How can you guide parents to handle the behavioral outbursts associated with trauma? Don't lecture the family, but educate the family on the impact of trauma and potential reactions, and model appropriate behaviors the parents can put into action on a daily basis. Use examples of the issues they are having with the child's behavior as an opportunity to model and practice ways to handle the concerns. Teach them the following key points in handling behavioral issues:

- When dealing with misbehavior, work to understand the child's needs. Why are they having the issue? Are they over stimulated, do they have difficulty with quick changes, are they over stressed? Then, correct their behavior by addressing the need.
- Accept their feelings even if you don't think they're accurate. The truth is, the child feels that way.
- Respond sensitively, appropriately, and consistently to the child's concerns
- Use eye contact, kind touch, lots of conversation, and listen with full attention
- Help the child express their feelings. Often misbehavior results from acting out on their emotions. (eg, they are so angry they become aggressive)
- Nurture the child even when the child seems unlikeable. Separate the child from the behavior.

For more information, view our ["Trauma, Attachment, and Positive Discipline"](#) unit and our ["The Importance of Attachment for Children and Teens"](#) unit.

How do I build resilience and self-confidence in the child and family?

It is important that the child and family believe that they have the ability to overcome obstacles that may come their way and achieve the goals they have set forth. Help them develop this confidence by:

- Focusing on strengths over weaknesses - helping them identify and build on the resources they already have
- Appreciating successes and positive steps towards their goal. Be sure they recognize and celebrate even the smallest of steps.
- Helping them build coping skills such as expressing emotions, effective communication, problem solving, and more.

Ensure that all family members have the opportunity to share their wishes and speak up about their concerns and the others truly listen and support them.

Making progress in each of these areas will build the family's resilience and confidence, and lead to healthy relationships and rewarding futures.

For more information, visit our [Life Skills Education](#) page.

How can I help the family build their support network in the community?

The presence of a strong safety net and support network makes all the difference in the well-being of a family. Knowing they have someone to turn to when needed removes a level of stress.

Encourage the family to look to extended family, neighbors, teachers, religious leaders, etc. Sometimes people are uncomfortable asking others for help, but guide them to just build/rebuild the relationship as a first step. No need to ask for help right away. As they build a safety net, others will know when the family is in need of support and will often reach out to them. And it wouldn't be surprising if the family could be of support to others in their network as well.

What if appropriate schools are not available in the child's community - would it be better for the child to remain in the CCI to get a quality education?

Lack of educational resources is a common reason for children entering CCIs. While we applaud the parents' desire for a quality education for their child, the benefits of the child remaining in the family are immeasurable. Thus, the goal is to locate viable educational options.

Consider the following options:

- Provide transportation to nearby school
- Establish remote education via electronic devices
- Investigate the possibility of the child staying with extended family near schools

How do I know what type of support services would help a child struggling academically?

It is important to understand and identify the root cause of their struggles. Seek input from the child's teachers as well as the child themselves -- the child may be able to pinpoint why they are having difficulty in school.

Be sure to consider the role of stress/anxiety or other emotions, lack of sleep, poor diet/hydration, and vision/hearing difficulties in the academic struggles.

Consider arranging for testing with a specialist for Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder or whatever is recommended.

Whatever the cause of the struggles, provide academic as well as emotional support. The child likely feels like a failure in school, the place where they spend many hours a day. Their self-esteem may be suffering, and they might be teased or even bullied by their peers. Give the child an opportunity to share their feelings about their difficulties in school and guide them to understand that they are precious and loved no matter what.

For more information, view our ["Supporting the Needs of Children with Learning Disabilities"](#) unit.

What are some examples of role play/practice sessions I could do with families during my visits?

The most effective way to teach families how to handle behavioral issues with their children is not to lecture, but to guide them through a role play so they have the opportunity to practice and receive your feedback.

The following are methods to respond to common behavioral issues. Help the parent/caregiver come up with a personalized scenario, and walk them through their responses. Provide guidance and feedback gently, and remember that it takes time and practice to develop and feel comfortable with a new skill.

Responding to the child's outbursts -

- Practice attachment behaviors: calm voice, bend down to eye level, good eye contact, hand on shoulder or hold hand
- “Tell me what happened and what you're feeling”, listen, respond calmly
- Allow the child to cry and let their feelings out, give them the time needed
- Work together to resolve the issue
- When calm, review with the child how they could have handled the situation better and what they can do next time

Responding to feelings -

- Gently tell the child what you are seeing. (eg, “You’ve been so quiet all day”, “I noticed that you are spending a lot of time alone in your room”)
- Acknowledge that they have a right to their feelings. Let them know that you are there for them if they wish to share. Do not pressure.
- If the child opens up, listen, listen, listen. Don’t jump directly to judgment or advice. Remember to use your active listening skills - this would be a good time to practice.

Responding to siblings arguing/fighting -

- The first step is to diffuse the situation. Separate the children until they can speak calmly and rationally.
- Allow each child to express their anger and frustration, but they must do so without shouting or screaming. Keep your voice level low and calm - it will model appropriate conduct for them. Guide them to take a deep breath if needed.
- Give each child the opportunity to tell their side of the story uninterrupted, and the other child must listen carefully.
- Help them problem solve and come up with a solution that might require compromise, but can satisfy both.
- If at any point in the process, feelings escalate and shouting resumes, return to step one.

These are just a few sample scenarios parents/caregivers may experience. Remember that the idea is to use their frustrations with the child's behavior as a personal scenario to practice responses.