

# INFORMATION PACKET

## TOPIC 4: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

2014

(From the: Trauma Informed Caregiving for Resource Families Series)

### CREDITS:

Material originally used in the ACRF Rural Teleconference Series “Trauma Informed Caregiving for Resource Families and taken from the Participant Handbook developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Curriculum for Resource Families

[http://nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/rpc/RPC\\_ParticipantHandbook\\_FINAL.pdf](http://nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/rpc/RPC_ParticipantHandbook_FINAL.pdf)



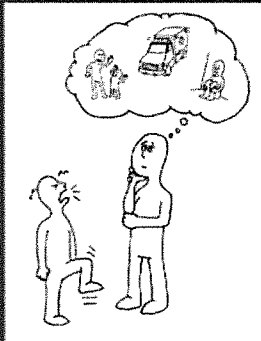
The following information packet contains several articles on the above topic. If you wish to receive training credit for reading this packet, please fill out the “Information Packet Questionnaire” at the back of this packet. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 1.0 hour of training credit. The articles are yours to keep for further reference.

Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Ave Suite 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
1-800-478-7307  
479-7307 (Fairbanks/North Pole)

[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)

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The Alaska Center for Resource Families, a project of Northwest Resource Associates, is under contract with the State of Alaska Office of Children’s Services to provide training and information to foster parents statewide.



Illustrations by Erich Ippen, Jr. Used with permission.

## Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

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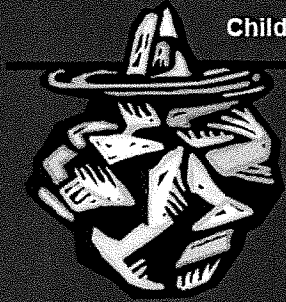
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### Seeing Below the Surface



Child's behaviors

Child's feelings, thoughts,  
expectations, and  
beliefs

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### Essential Elements 3 and 4



- 3. Help your child to understand and manage overwhelming emotions.
- 4. Help your child to understand and modify problem behaviors.

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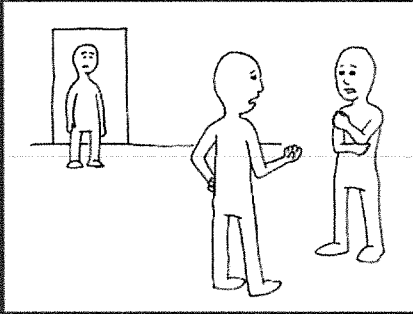
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## What If . . . ? (Group Activity)



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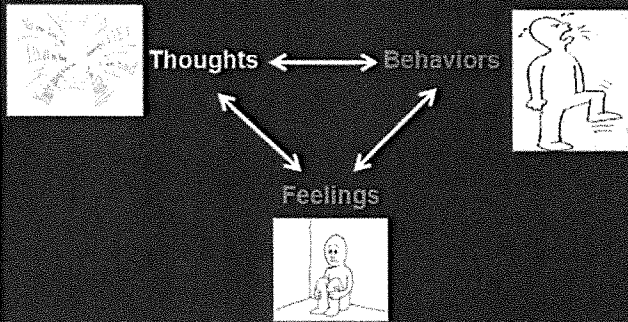
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## The Cognitive Triangle



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## Trauma and the Triangle



Children who have experienced trauma may find it hard to:

- See the connection between their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
- Understand and express their own emotional reactions
- Accurately read other people's emotional cues
- Control their reactions to threats or trauma reminders

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## Trauma and the Triangle

(Continued)



Children may act out as a way of:

- Reenacting patterns or relationships from the past
- Increasing interaction, even if the interactions are negative
- Keeping caregivers at a physical or emotional distance
- "Proving" the beliefs in their Invisible Suitcase
- Venting frustration, anger, or anxiety
- Protecting themselves

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*Whenever I feel threatened I get this feeling that I want to hurt anybody who might try to harm me and my sister.*

*I started cursing at the foster mom. I wanted her to lose control. I figured that sooner or later she would say something that would hurt me. I wanted to hurt her first. . .*

*Later, I felt depressed. I knew I'd acted out of control. When I get angry I don't even realize what I do and I hurt the people around me. . .*

*I feel sad that I'm not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.*

—A. M.

Am I too angry to love? *Repress!* Nov./Dec. 2004

Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/Nov/Dec2004/FCYU-2004-11-10.htm>

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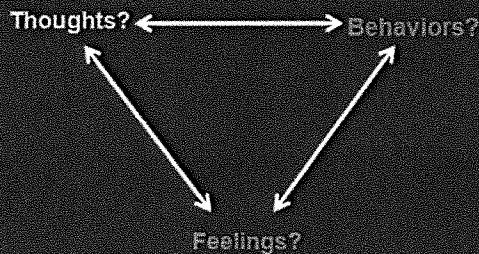
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## Decoding the Triangle

(Group Activity)



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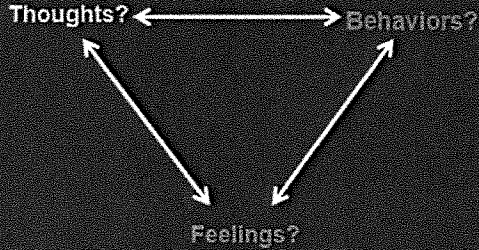
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## Decoding the Triangle (Continued)



What are your child's . . .



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*Experience is biology. . . Parents are the active sculptors of their children's growing brains.*

—Daniel J. Siegel, M. D.  
& Mary Hartzell, M. Ed.

Siegel, D.J. & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

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## How You Can Help



- Differentiate yourself from past caregivers.
- Tune in to your child's emotions.
- Set an example of the emotional expression and behaviors you expect.
- Encourage positive emotional expression and behaviors by supporting the child's strengths and interests.
- Correct negative behaviors and inappropriate or destructive emotional expression, and help your child build new behaviors and emotional skills.

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## Differentiate



Take care not to:

- "Buy into" the beliefs in their invisible suitcases
- React in anger or the heat of the moment
- Take behavior at face value
- Take it personally

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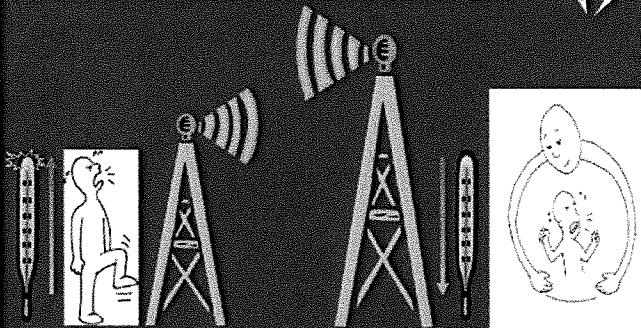
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## Tune In



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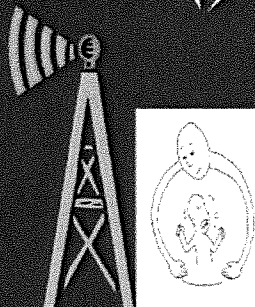
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## Tune In (Continued)



- Help the child identify and put into words the feelings beneath the actions.
- Acknowledge and validate the child's feelings.
- Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.



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## Tune In (Continued)



- Let the child know it's okay to talk about painful things.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Be reassuring, but be honest.



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## Tune In (Continued)



Provide opportunities to practice emotional skills in playful, nonthreatening ways:

- Feelings thermometer/feelings charts
- Feelings charades
- Other practice activities
- Games and storybooks

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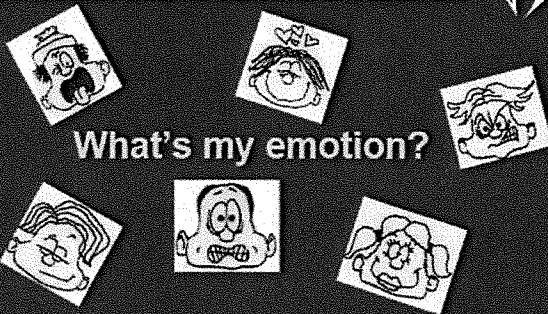
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## Let's Play . . .



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## Set an Example



Express the full range of emotions:

- Stay clear, calm, and consistent.
- Be honest and genuine.
- Let your child know that it's normal to feel different (or mixed) emotions at the same time.

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*[One day] my rabbit died. I started to cry. That rabbit was so small and defenseless. It needed me and I let it die. Then [my foster mother] hugged me. "If that happened to my cat . . . I would feel the same way that you do," she said. She wanted my rabbit to be buried and offered to buy me another one. That's how I realized she wasn't a fake.*

*I felt different at that moment. It was like she felt the anger that I had inside of me, and was saying that it was OK to feel that way. That it was OK to be sad and for me to let my guard down . . . That it was OK to let someone into my world and let them help me.*

— A. M.

Learning to love again. *Represent*. July/Aug 2006.  
Available at <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/JulyAug2006/2006-07-04b.htm>

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## What happened? (Group Activity)



- Why did A. M. react the way she did?
- What did her foster mother do right?
- Have you ever experienced something similar with the children in your care?

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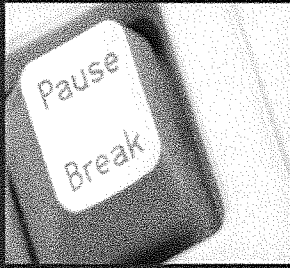
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Let's take a break!

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## Encourage



Encourage positive behaviors:

- “Catch” your child being good.
- Praise, praise, praise!
  - Be specific.
  - Be prompt.
  - Be warm.
- Strive for at least six praises for every one correction.

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## Encourage *(Continued)*



Encourage and support the child's strengths and interests:

- Offer choices whenever possible.
- Let children “do it themselves.”
- Recognize and encourage the child's unique interests and talents.
- Help children master a skill.

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## Taking Stock (Group Activity)



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## Taking Stock (Continued)



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## Achieving a Balance



- What talents/skills/interests can you encourage?
- Where can you give the child some control?
- What fun activities/interests can you share?
- What kinds of praise would your child appreciate?
- What kind of rewards would be most meaningful?

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## Correct and Build



When correcting negative or inappropriate behavior and setting consequences:

- Be clear, calm, and consistent.
- Target one behavior at a time.
- Avoid shaming or threatening.
- Keep the child's age (and "emotional age") in mind.
- Be prepared to "pick your battles."

*(Continued)*

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## Correct and Build *(Continued)*



Focus on helping your child . . .

- Understand the links between thoughts, feelings, and behavior
- Understand the negative impact of his or her behavior
- Identify alternatives to problem/negative behaviors
- Practice techniques for changing negative thoughts and calming runaway emotions

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## Dealing with Problem Behaviors (Group Activity)



- What are the negative effects of this behavior on your child's life?
- How can you help your child to understand these effects?
- What alternatives can you suggest for this behavior?
- What consequences can you set if the behavior continues?

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# Tuning In to Your Child's Emotions: Tips for Resource Parents

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As resource parents, we can play an important role in helping our children to understand, express, and regulate their emotions. Here are some crucial dos and don'ts to keep in mind when reacting to—and talking about—children's emotions.

## Things to Do

### ***Validate the child's emotions***

When your child expresses an emotion, let him or her know that you have heard, understood, and accepted how he or she is feeling. Validating emotions will help your child feel comfortable and secure, and encourage the child to express emotions and have conversations with you about them.

Keep in mind that validating an emotion does **not** mean accepting a problem behavior (such as hitting when angry or frustrated). You can validate an emotion but, at the same time, set appropriate limits on behavior ("I can tell it makes you really mad when your sister takes your toys . . . but it is not okay to hit your sister.")

### ***Be empathetic***

Being empathetic lets your child know that you understand his or her emotion. Try to:

- Take your child's perspective
- Let your child know you understand the way he or she feels
- Use warmth and affection

Empathy also can be a powerful tool for helping children to recognize the deeper, more complicated emotions that may lie just beneath their initial reactions. As you empathize with your child, try to help him or her to understand the mixed feelings he or she may be feeling, and to make finer distinctions between related emotions such as anger, frustration, disappointment, etc. For example:

Child: "I can't do my homework. I'm mad. School is stupid."

Parent: "Sounds like you're getting frustrated with your homework. It is getting pretty hard."

Child: "Dad didn't pick me up this weekend like he said he would. I hate him."

Parent: "Sounds like you are really mad at Dad. I wonder if you are also feeling kind of sad or hurt?"

## ***Let your child know his or her feelings are normal***

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Normalization makes your child feel comfortable with his or her emotion(s). Let your child know that you sometimes feel the same way and that other people do, too.

Example: "I bet a lot of other kids also feel scared when the lights go out in a storm."

## **Things to Avoid**

### ***Invalidating the child's emotions***

Steer clear of anything that may devalue what your child is feeling, such as suggesting that something wasn't as bad as the child felt it was ("There's nothing to be scared of") or that he or she should have gotten over it ("Big boys aren't scared of the dark"). Invalidating can make your child feel uncomfortable with his or her emotions and uneasy talking to you about feelings and experiences.

### ***Lecturing or interrogating the child***

Before giving advice or explaining the situation, focus on how your child feels. Although asking questions can help you to understand your child's perspective, bombarding him or her with questions can also move the conversation away from feelings. This is especially true if you focus only on the specifics of what happened ("What did Johnny do?"), as opposed to what the child experienced ("How did it make you feel?"). In particular, avoid questions that are criticism in disguise. ("Why would you do that?" or "What did you do to make Mommy so mad?")

### ***Telling the child what to feel***

"Should" statements can send a message that the child has no right to feel the way he or she does. Avoid saying things that question or doubt your child's experience ("Are you sure you felt so sad?") or that tell your child what he or she is supposed to feel ("You shouldn't be mad at your brother").

### ***Hanging the child out to dry***

When your child shares something emotional, don't leave your child waiting for a response. Traumatized children, in particular, need reassurance that their feelings are worthy of your attention and care. Even if the timing isn't ideal, stop and acknowledge what the child has shared, and let him or her know that you are willing to listen.

### ***Criticizing or blaming the child***

Avoid statements that blame or criticize your child for what he or she is feeling, even if the child was the cause of the situation.

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Adapted with permission from: Shipman, K., & Fitzgerald, M. (n.d.) *Teaching caregivers to talk with children about emotion: Implications for treating child trauma*. [Slide presentation]. Available online at [http://www.chadwickcenter.org/CD/SDConference/Presentations/C9\\_Shipman-Fitzgerald\\_Teaching%20Caregivers%20To%20Talk%20with%20Children%20about%20Emotion.pdf](http://www.chadwickcenter.org/CD/SDConference/Presentations/C9_Shipman-Fitzgerald_Teaching%20Caregivers%20To%20Talk%20with%20Children%20about%20Emotion.pdf)

## “Make Your Own” Feelings Chart

**Instructions:** Look through magazines, or color copies of photos of family and friends, and cut out pictures of faces that show you each of the feelings named below. You will notice there are blank spots for you to add other feelings you would like to include.

<b>Happy</b>	<b>Calm</b>	<b>Tired</b>	<b>Sad</b>
<b>Worried</b>	<b>Scared</b>	<b>Peaceful</b>	<b>Confused</b>
<b>Angry</b>	<b>Excited</b>	<b>Lonely</b>	<b>Proud</b>
<b>Hurt</b>	<b>Shy</b>	<b>Stressed-Out</b>	<b>Other _____</b>
<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>	<b>Other _____</b>

# INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE

**TOPIC 4: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors**

**1.0 Hour**

<b>NAME:</b> _____	<b>PHONE NO.:</b> _____	
<i>Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.</i>		
<b>ADDRESS:</b> _____	_____	_____
<i>Street or Post Office</i>	<i>City/State</i>	<i>Zip</i>
<b>EMAIL:</b> _____		
<input type="radio"/> <b>YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.</b> <i>(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for Resource Families)</i>		
Are you a foster parent?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO	If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _____
If NO, please check one:	<input type="radio"/> Pending Foster Parent <input type="radio"/> OCS <input type="radio"/> Birth Parent <input type="radio"/> Adoptive Parent	
<input type="radio"/> Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____ )	<input type="radio"/> Agency: _____	
<input type="radio"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i> : _____		

***Please read the information packet. Then fill out this questionnaire and RETURN TO: ACRF, 815 Second Avenue Suite 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Or fax it to: 907-479-9666, you will be credited with 1.0 hour for completion of this worksheet.***

1. This packet presents concepts and ideas that may be useful to your foster parenting experience. Please list two (2) specific ideas or concepts which you learned or reaffirmed from reading this packet. Write a short sentence or two describing how you can use them in your family.

a)

b)

# INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE

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2. List each title in this packet. In a few sentences for each article, summarize the main purpose or key points for each article in this packet.