

Foster & Kinship Care Education Program

TEENS 101

Caregiving and Supporting Teens and Young Adults with Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Presented by:
Alyssa Thom, LCSW

1

What does this mean?

- “At-risk youth” is a **youth who is less likely to transition successfully into adulthood**. Success can include academic success and job readiness, as well as the ability to be financially independent. It also can refer to the ability to become a positive member of society by avoiding a life of crime.
- A 'troubled teen' is a term used for a youth that is having problems which are causing negative behaviors and if these problems continue to affect the teen, he/she will not develop into a happy, successful adult. These problems are beyond the normal issues that all adolescents face
- A 'troubled teen' is a term used for a youth that is having problems which are causing negative behaviors and if these problems continue to affect the teen, he/she will not develop into a happy, successful adult. These problems are beyond the normal issues that all adolescents face

2

At-Risk/Troubled/ Emotionally Disturbed (ED)

Young people needing extra support

- Economical
- Social
- Environmental
- Trauma exposed



3

Trauma and It's Impacts

- Early childhood experiences greatly impact later functioning
- Difficulty with mood regulation
- Inconsistent caregiving
- Parental figures unable to regulate
- Lack of future planning

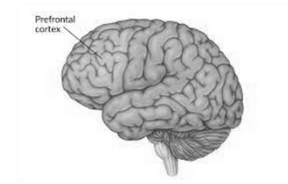


4

Brain Development

Pre-frontal cortex

- Reasoning ability
- Not fully developed until age 25
- Substance use could impact development



Early childhood experiences—Domestic violence, in-utero drug exposure, unavailable/unresponsive caregivers

5

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

- ACES- experiences like poverty, violence, racism, caregiver mental health issues, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, household violence
- The more ACES the more likely the individual will have physical health problems
- Prevention-eliminating exposure to ACES
- Healing-mental health treatment, exposure to nature, caring adult/mentor figure, education on how stressful experiences impact the physical body



6

ACES/Epigenetics video 15 mins



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk>

7

ED Tips in the Classroom (and home)

Keep Rules and Activities Clear and Simple

- 3-5 main rules
 - Have them be part of the rule creating
 - Focus on safety, not control



Reward Positive Behaviors

- Discipline is often viewed as a personal attack, likely not learn from it
- Celebrate success more than reprimand their mistakes
 - Positive benefit for having good behavior

8

ED Tips in the Classroom (and home)

Allow for mini-breaks

- Breaks when doing homework or chores-active breaks if possible

Fair Treatment for All

- All rules and consequences should be the same for every child in the home
- If child doesn't get the same treatment be sure to give specific reasons why

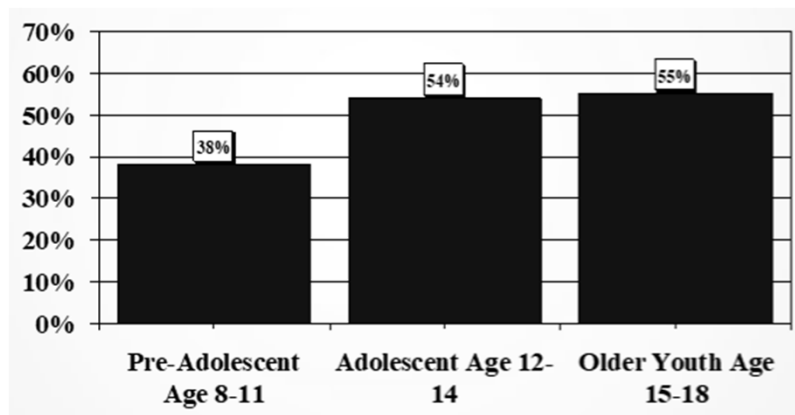
Use Motivational Strategies

- Celebrate hard work, praise efforts



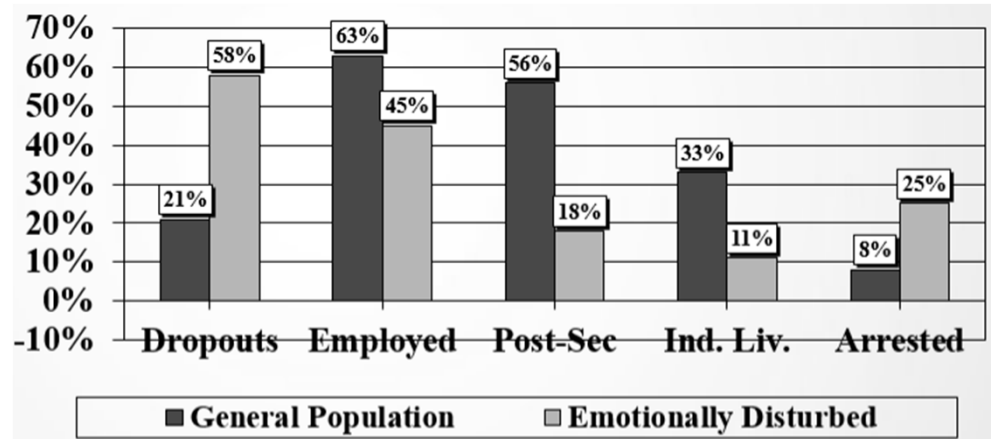
9

Comparison of Transition Domains with young people with ED



10

Likelihood of Youth with EBD Being Incarcerated



11

Risk Taking Behaviors

Adolescence/teen risk taking-why?

- ✓ Gain peer acceptance
- ✓ Feelings of independence
- ✓ Lack of understanding of immediate behavior and long term consequences
- ✓ Tendency to assess themselves as less vulnerable in a risky situation



12

Reducing Risk Taking Behaviors

- Caregivers who are responsive to their questions, concerns, and feelings
- Maintaining an open, ongoing dialogue about risk-taking and typical risky behaviors
- Respecting the developmental need for increasing freedom-not being too unnecessarily strict/rigid
- Encouraging extra-curricular activities, decreases likelihood of taking risks out of boredom
- Strong, cohesive, family structure



13

Sexuality

- Adolescent attitudes of sexuality largely influenced by culture
- Potentially due to limited concrete operational reasoning base sexual behavior on the present rather than consideration of long-term consequences
- Lapses in judgement under stress of managing sexuality- “It won’t happen to me.”
- Higher frequency of sexual activity reported among disadvantaged teens— poor educational resources, poverty, fatalistic attitudes
- Pregnancy-teens most at risk are girls from father absent homes, live in

14

Safer Sex Practices

Information/education/supplies

- STD symptoms, reproduction education, access to birth control

Motivation

- Testimonies from peers, discussion of personal goals, myth busting

Behavioral Skills

- Healthy communication and assertiveness training/practice

Self-Efficacy

- Need to believe in their ability to act in their own best interests

15

Substance Use/Abuse

Experimental stage

- Peer pressure, curiosity, risk-taking

Social Stage

- Expected activity within social circle, or way to gain access to social circle

Instrumental Stage

- Used for purpose of how the substance affects them-feeling good, numbing unpleasant emotions

Habitual Stage

- Becomes integral part of the user's life. May neglect relationships and previously enjoyed activities. User develops tolerance and dependence



16

Substance Use/Abuse – How to Help

- Information and education-focused on reducing risk and promoting competencies
- Focus on reducing susceptibility to abuse, help teen learn healthier alternatives to coping with external stressors
- Explore alternative methods for teen to achieve benefits they perceive the substance provides for them
- Harm reduction model may be most helpful for teens with active addiction



17

Depression

- More than everyday sadness
- Last for more than 2 weeks
- Affects ability to do activities of daily living
- Often recurrent-person recovers, but it comes back
- Symptoms:
 - ✓ Unusually sad mood
 - ✓ Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities
 - ✓ Lack of energy
 - ✓ Difficulty concentrating
 - ✓ Changes in eating habits



18

First Episode Psychosis

Losing contact with reality—hallucinations, delusions, severe disruptions in thinking

- ✓ Most likely to have first psychosis experience between older teen-young adult years
- ✓ Usually a result of a traumatic experience
- ✓ Could be drug-induced
- ✓ Not all psychosis is harmful or bad
 - May find voices comforting, friendly, help with isolation



19

Behavioral Health Crisis

- Definition from Minnesota: A behavioral, emotional, or psychiatric situation which for the provision of crisis response services, would likely result in significantly reduced levels of functioning in primary activities of daily living, or in the placement of the recipient in a more restrictive setting, including inpatient hospitalization.
- Causes: Increased stress, changes in family situations, bullying at school, poverty, transitions, pressure from peers/caregivers, substance use, trauma and/or violence at home or community.

20

Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis

Significant changes in behavior

- Inability to cope with daily tasks
- Rapid mood swings
- Increase in energy
- Increased agitation
- Displays abusive behavior
- Loses touch with reality (psychosis)
- Isolation from school, family, friends
- Unexplained physical symptoms



21

➤ Safety first!

- Are they in danger of hurting themselves or others?
- Do you need emergency assistance?
- Do you need to contact support from a mental health professional or crisis team?
- Do you need law enforcement?

➤ Encourage self-help/professional help

➤ Give reassurance and information

➤ Listen non-judgmentally



22

Video-Parent Teen Communication, 6 mins



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_HfbiM5jjE

23

Healthy Communication

- ✓ Use of "I statements"
- ✓ Creating a space of mutual respect and trust
- ✓ Balance of respect and consequences
- ✓ Focus on safety instead of control
- ✓ Flexibility versus rigidness
- ✓ Normal for adults to make mistakes-own them



24

Understanding Exploring Identity

- Normal exploration into personality and gender identity
- May try different ways of expressing themselves
 - Status
 - Clothes-self expression
 - Exploring independence-clothing is one thing teens have some control in
- Helps them feel connected to peers/community groups
- Caregivers-help them identify their values
 - May not fully align with caregivers
 - Have them make list of things they view as important to them

25

Respecting Pronouns, Chosen Names



- Normal for teens to explore gender and sexual expression
- May want to go by different pronouns than what their assigned birth sex may be
- May decide to go by a different name other than their birth name

Caregivers-this is normal exploration, important to maintain the relationship and respect teens chosen names and pronouns despite how you may feel about it—this shows respect and care.

26

Resolving Conflicts



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9_WwuGF4dM

27

Crisis Verbal De-escalation


In a crisis, reasoning is nearly impossible

- ✓ Empathize with child's feelings
- ✓ Help de-escalate the crisis
- ✓ Assess the situation on if further assistance is needed- seek outside help



28

De-escalation Techniques

- Keep your voice calm
 - Avoid overacting
 - Listen
 - Don't argue or reason
 - Express concern and support
 - Ask how you can help
- 
- Keep stimulation level low
 - Move slowly
 - Offer options instead of trying to take control
 - Be patient
 - Gently announce actions before initiating them
 - Give them space

29

Understanding Triggers

- Built in alarm system that signals when we are in danger
- Brain labels something in environment as dangerous
- Normative Danger Response
 - Brain recognizes danger, it prepares body to fight
 - ✓ Fight,
 - ✓ Flight
 - ✓ Freeze



30

Understanding Triggers

Overactive Response

- Goes off often due to repeated danger in the past
- Perceive danger more quickly and may label non-threatening things as potentially dangerous



What triggers alarm?

- When we hear, see, or feel something that reminds us of a dangerous/frightening event
- Brain has learned to recognize them as dangerous due to past experiences

31

Understanding Triggers

Common Triggers for Traumatized Adolescents/Teens

- ✓ Unpredictability or sudden change
- ✓ Transitioning from activities
- ✓ Loss of control
- ✓ Feelings of vulnerability or rejection
- ✓ Confrontation, authority, or limit setting
- ✓ Loneliness
- ✓ Sensory overload

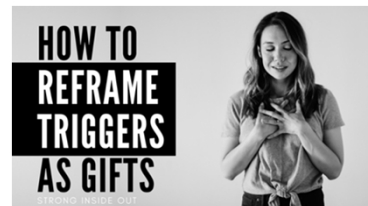
Triggers may not always make sense or may difficult for the person to verbalize.



32

How to Help with Triggers

- Help achieve safety in the face of perceived danger
- Listen without judgement, empathize
- Encourage healthy coping strategies
 - ✓ Breathing exercises, taking a walk, listening to music
 - ✓ Mindfulness activities
 - ✓ Phone Apps-CALM



33

Engagement with Young People

Its all about the relationship!

- Build rapport
- Ask open ended questions
- Listen without judgement
- Be interested in their interests



34

Transition to Independence Skills

TIP: The Transition to Independence Process is a system that helps engage youth in their own futures planning process, provides them with services/supports, & involves them (& others) in a process that prepares & facilitates greater self-sufficiency & successful achievement of goals related to each Transition Domain.

35

Transition Domains

- ✓ Educational Opportunity
- ✓ Employment and Career
- ✓ Living Situation
- ✓ Personal Effectiveness and Wellbeing

Big areas in a young persons life that they are navigating and are in constant flow/change



36

Transition Domains: Subdomains

Personal Effectiveness and Wellbeing

- Interpersonal relationships
- Emotionally and Behavioral Wellbeing
- Self-Determination
- Physical Health and Wellbeing

Community Life Functioning

- Daily living skills
- Leisure activities
- Community Participation



Mental Health and
Emotional Wellbeing

37

TIP Guidelines

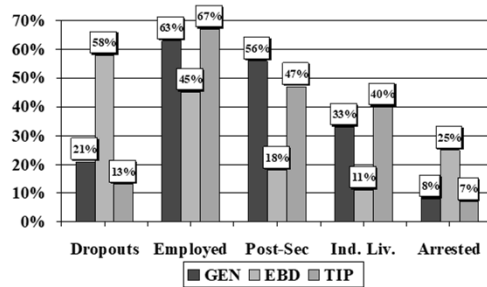
- ✓ Services should be tailored for the client
- ✓ Focus on building strengths
- ✓ Focus on relationship and rapport building
- ✓ Meeting with the teen where it is most comfortable
 - Outside spaces, walks, they get to choose



38

Comparison of Transition Outcomes

General Population, EBD, TIP



39

Teens in Foster Care



- Harder to find resource family homes
- More likely to be placed in group home type settings
- Often separated from younger siblings
- Option to exit foster care at 21 if eligible
 - Needs to be making progress in school, work, or eliminating barriers
 - Young person gets funding and social work case management

40

Permanency and Teens



Less likely to be adopted

- Harder to find permanent long term placements
- Teen gets to choose permanency options

Benefits for adopted teens

- AAP assistance and insurance until 21 years old automatically

Every young person needs a caring mentor/adult to help them be successful.

41

Aging Out of Foster Care Video – 11 min



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTFesAPeRVo>

42

Local Resources in our Community

Department of Health and Human Services, TAY Division

- Independent Living Skills Program
- Extended Foster Care
- Behavioral Health
- Drop In space

Redwood Coast Community Action Agency

- Raven Project
- Youth Service Bureau (YSB)

Wellness Centers in Schools



43

THANK YOU!

- Adolescent, teenage, and young adult years can be challenging for caregivers and supportive adults, but you have the capacity to make a difference if you are willing to put in the effort and time.



44

Foster and Kinship Care Education
Program

**WE JUST WANT TO SAY...
THANK YOU!**

Website: www.redwoods.edu/foster

Facebook: Foster/Kinship Care Education
Program-College of the Redwoods

