

Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

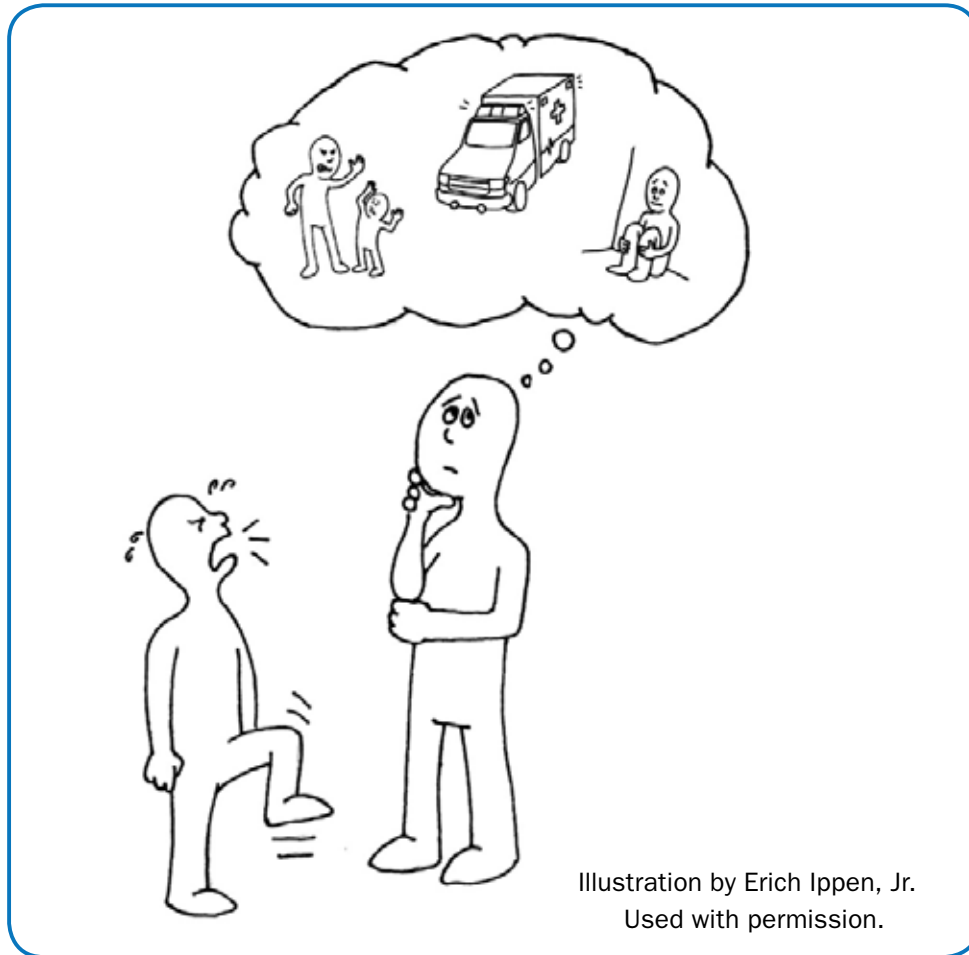





Illustration by Erich Ippen, Jr.
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What You Will Need

- Module 5 PowerPoint slides 1–31
- “My Child” Worksheet, Module 5 (*Participant Handbook*, p. MC-11)
- Bowls for “What’s my emotion?” and “Taking Stock” Group Activities
- Slips of paper (with one emotion per slip) for the “What’s my emotion?” Group Activity
- Small candies (M&Ms®, Skittles®, etc.) for “Taking Stock” Group Activity

- Paper cups for “Taking Stock” Group Activity
- Pens/pencils

Icon Reminders

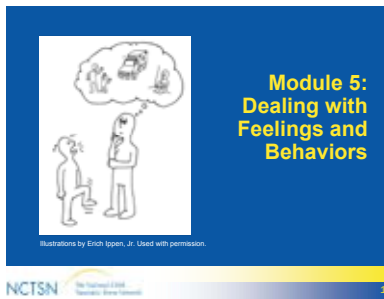
-  Facilitator tip
-  Group activity/discussion
-  Click to advance slide content

Facilitator Goals

- Introduce participants to the Cognitive Triangle, and the impact of trauma on children's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Introduce techniques for helping traumatized children understand and control their emotional and behavioral reactions.

Key Learning Objectives

- Describe the Cognitive Triangle and apply it to a child who has experienced trauma.
- Identify at least three reasons why children who have experienced trauma may act out.
- Describe at least three ways in which resource parents can help children develop new emotional skills and positive behaviors.



Module 5: Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors

Before participants arrive, write on the board (or an easel) the Big Ideas that the group identified during the last module.

Greet participants as they enter the room.

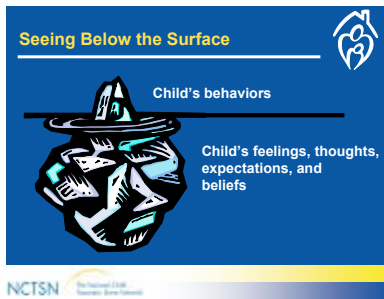
Keep participants informed of the time remaining until the workshop begins.

Remind participants of basic logistical information (location of bathrooms, timing of breaks, etc.).



Start the session by thanking the participants for returning and directing their attention to the Big Ideas from the last session. Ask the participants to share any experiences or insights they may have had since the last session that relate to these Big Ideas.

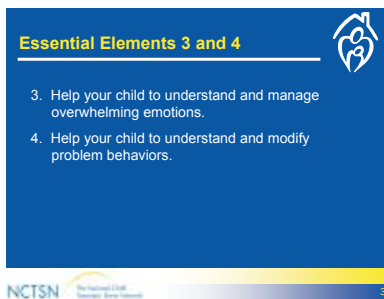
Allow five to 10 minutes for discussion before moving on to the next slide.



Seeing Below the Surface

Your child's problem behaviors are likely to be part of what motivated you to take this training.

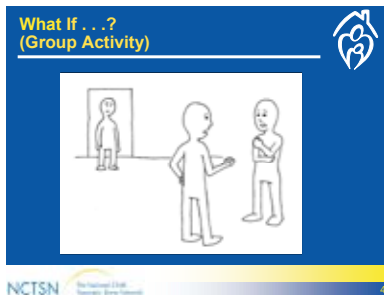
- ☎ But the behavior you see—no matter how disruptive and frustrating—is only the tip of the iceberg for children who've been through trauma.
- ☎ Below the surface are the feelings, thoughts, expectations, and beliefs that the children have accumulated as a result of their traumatic experiences.



Essential Elements 3 and 4

In this module we're going to learn some techniques for looking below the surface so we can fulfill Essential Elements 3 and 4:

- ☎ Help children to understand, express, and control their sometimes overwhelming emotional responses.
- ☎ Help children to understand and change the problem behaviors that come with those responses.



What If. . .? (Group Activity)

Imagine that you go to your child's school for a PTA meeting. As you walk in, you notice two parents you know only slightly on the other side of the room. They look your way, but continue to talk to each other without acknowledging you or coming over to you.

What are you likely to think?



Give participants time to respond, with one facilitator leading the discussion and the other noting participants' responses on the board or an easel. Possible responses could include:

- *They're talking about me*
- *They didn't see me*
- *They're angry at me*

After participants have provided several options/interpretations, ask
How would you feel in response to each of these thoughts?

Possible responses could include:

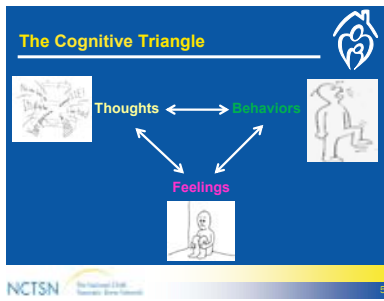
- *They're talking about me—angry/embarrassed/hurt*
- *They didn't see me—neutral/curious*
- *They're angry at me for some reason—worried/angry*

What action would you take based on those feelings?

Possible responses could include:

- *Angry/embarrassed/hurt—glare at them/snub them/say something nasty about them to one of the other parents*
- *Neutral/curious—go over and say hello/not worry about it and say hello if you run into them later*
- *Worried/angry—avoid them/rush over and confront them*

Even though the objective reality is exactly the same, our response to that reality changes depending on the way we think and feel about the situation.



The Cognitive Triangle

Psychologists refer to this relationship between what we think, what we feel, and what we do as the Cognitive Triangle. What we think directly affects how we feel, and how we feel affects how we behave.

You may have noticed that the arrows in the triangle are all two-way. That's because each element of the triangle influences the others and feeds back into the others. If you feel sad and stay in bed all day, you're only going to feel sadder, and you're likely keep having negative thoughts such as "I'm always going to be lonely." After a while, you won't know whether your feelings are causing your behavior or your behavior is creating your feelings. This is why many mental health experts believe that making a change at any point on the triangle will have an effect on the other two.

For example, in the situation we just discussed, even if your first thought was that the people across the room were talking about you, telling yourself "Oh, they must not have seen me" would change the way you felt and acted in that situation. A simple shift in thinking can have a profound effect on feelings and behavior.

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

(Continued)

Trauma and the Triangle

When you recognize the connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, it's much easier to make these kinds of changes.

- 🗣️ But seeing these connections can be difficult for children and adolescents whose development has been derailed by trauma.
- 🗣️ They may find it hard to understand or express what they are feeling and why.
- 🗣️ They may not be very good at accurately reading other people's emotional cues.
- 🗣️ They may be extremely reactive to any perceived threat. Seemingly minor things can set off a flood of emotions that the child can barely describe, let alone control.



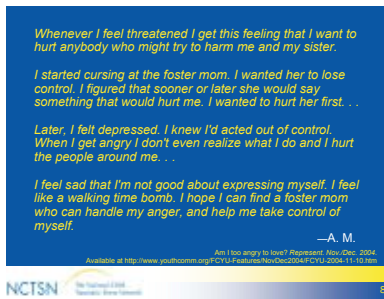
Children may act out as a way of:

- 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

Trauma and the Triangle (Continued)

Although these emotional reactions and behaviors can be frustrating and challenging, they are not calculated or conscious. Children who have been through trauma may act out for a variety of unconscious reasons, including:

- ☞ To reenact patterns or relationships from the past, including the conditions in their prior home, which may have been chaotic, but were at least familiar
- ☞ To increase their interactions with you—even if the attention is negative
- ☞ To keep people—including you—at a physical and emotional distance
- ☞ To “prove”—on an unconscious level—that the negative beliefs in their Invisible Suitcases are true (“You can’t fool me—sooner or later, you’ll get mad and reject me!”)
- ☞ To vent frustration, anger, or anxiety
- ☞ To protect themselves. In fact, many of the troubling behaviors and reactions that we see in children who have been through trauma may actually have helped them to survive in troubled or abusive homes. But those survival strategies can get in the way of learning other equally important emotional skills, including the development of healthy new relationships.



Read-Aloud Quote

Ask for a volunteer to read the quote on the slide. If no one volunteers, one facilitator should read the slide aloud.

“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. . .

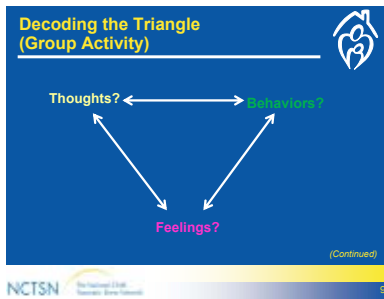
I feel sad that I’m not good about expressing myself. I feel like a walking time bomb. I hope I can find a foster mom who can handle my anger, and help me take control of myself.”

Does this sound familiar? How many of us have cared for children who felt like “walking time bombs”?



Remind participants that they may

remember A. M. from the previous session on “Building a Safe Place,” and that they can read her full story—in her own words—beginning on page 4-19 of their Participant Handbook.




Decoding the Triangle (Group Activity)

Let's look at how A. M.'s experience ties in to the Cognitive Triangle.



One facilitator should lead the discussion, while the other draws the triangle and records notes on the board or easel.


 What are A. M.'s underlying thoughts?

Responses should include: Something or someone is going to hurt me or my sister.

One of the beliefs in A. M.'s Invisible Suitcase seems to be that "sooner or later" everyone will hurt her.

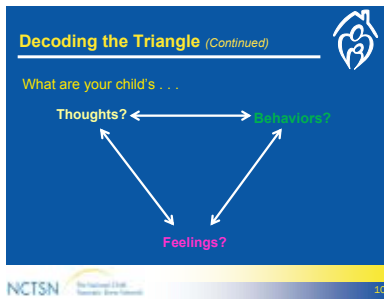
 What is she feeling?

Responses should include: anger, fear.

 What are her behaviors?

Responses should include: cursing and lashing out.

Within a couple of weeks of this incident, A. M.'s foster mom asked that she and her sister be removed. This must have only reinforced her belief that hurt is inevitable and that she is too angry to love.



Decoding the Triangle (Continued)

Let's try applying the triangle to a child you actually know.

Turn to the "My Child" Worksheet on page MC-11 of the *Participant Handbook*.

- 👤 Think of a particular problem behavior that you have encountered with the child in your "My Child" worksheet. Write a brief description of the situation and the behavior under the "Behavior" heading of the triangle.

Allow a moment for participants to come up with a situation/behavior and write it down.

Now it's time to use your "trauma lens"! Consider everything you know about the child's trauma history and relationships with other caregivers. Think about the beliefs and expectations the child may have developed about him- or herself, about adults who are caregivers, and about the world in general.

- 👤 Based on what you know, what thoughts could have led up to this behavior? Note them down.

Allow a moment for participants to write down their child's thoughts.

- 👤 What feelings could your child have been experiencing?

Allow a moment for participants to write down their child's feelings.



Ask for up to three volunteers to share their child's Cognitive Triangle with the group. One facilitator should lead the discussion, while the other draws the triangles and information on the board or easel. After each volunteer presents the triangle, allow three minutes or so for a larger group discussion of how the child's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings relate to the child's past trauma.

Now let's consider how changing the thoughts or feelings of these children might affect their behaviors.

Allow five minutes for discussion.



Read-Aloud Quote

Ask for a volunteer to read the quote on the slide. If no one volunteers, one facilitator should read the slide aloud.

“Experience is biology . . . Parents are the active sculptors of their children’s growing brains.”

Understanding the Cognitive Triangle can help us make sense of our children’s behavior and reactions, but it will take time and patience to change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the children themselves. This is because traumatic experiences—particularly at a young age—throw normal, healthy development off course. As we saw in Module 3, trauma can sculpt the brain in a way that prepares the child for survival in a dangerous and unpredictable world.

But when we provide new, positive experiences and establish supportive relationships, we can help children who survived trauma to build new neural pathways—sculpting the brain so children can better understand, express, and control their emotions and behaviors.

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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How You Can Help

You can help this process in several ways:

- 1 Differentiate yourself from others in your child's past who may have been unpredictable, rejecting, angry or frightening, or simply absent.
- 2 Tune in to your child's emotions, and help your child to define and express his or her feelings.
- 3 Set an example of appropriate emotional expression and behavior.
- 4 Encourage positive emotional expression and behavior by supporting your child's strengths and interests.
- 5 Correct negative behaviors and inappropriate/destructive emotional expression and help your child build new behaviors and emotional skills.

We will spend the rest of our time in this session talking about each of these important strategies.

Differentiate



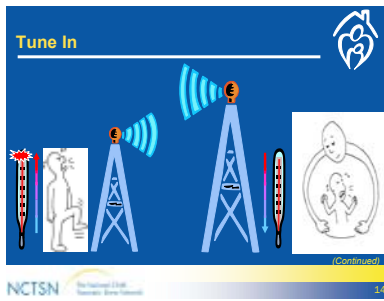
Take care not to:

- "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

Differentiate

One of the most basic things we can do is avoid repeating the child's negative experiences from the past. When faced with challenging behaviors or reactions, take care not to:

- 🕒 Buy into the child's negative beliefs and expectations.
- 🕒 React in anger or the heat of the moment. Sometimes this may mean stepping away and bringing your own thoughts and feelings under control before taking on your child's behavior.
- 🕒 Take the child's behavior at face value. Remember that what you are seeing is only the tip of the iceberg. As we saw with A. M., anger and acting out often mask feelings of fear, pain, and loss that the child is unable to express.
- 🕒 Take the child's behavior personally. Although the child is responding to you, the response may not be about you. Many, if not most, of the child's reactions are the result of the beliefs and expectations in his or her Invisible Suitcase.



Tune In

In addition to being aware of our own responses, we need to be aware of what our children are really feeling.

- 🗣️ Children who have experienced trauma will send out many signals about their feelings—but few will be direct, or even verbal.
- 🗣️ To be an effective emotional container, we need to tune in to the feelings behind children's words and actions,
- 🗣️ Help them understand and “cool down” confusing or out-of-control emotional responses, and
- 🗣️ Send consistent and reliable signals—both verbal and nonverbal—about safety, emotional expression, and behavior.

Let's go over some specifics . . .

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.

(Continued)

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Tune In (Continued)

- 🗣️ We can help children recognize their feelings by trying to put them into words. For example, say something like, “I wonder if you are feeling really scared about this?”
- 🗣️ Acknowledge the validity of the child’s emotions and his or her right to feel them. Let children know that “We don’t always have to see things the same way.” The simple act of recognizing and validating a child’s feelings can have a very powerful impact on children who have been through trauma.
- 🗣️ Acknowledge the seriousness of what the child is experiencing. Although it may be tempting to try to calm the child with statements like “Don’t cry, everything will be okay,” resist the impulse. It doesn’t reflect how the child feels and won’t make the child feel better.

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.

(Continued)

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Tune In (Continued)

- 👂 If your child talks about feelings or memories of trauma, stay calm and be supportive and matter-of-fact. Let the child know that it is okay to talk about both the good and the bad. (We will be going into this in more detail in Module 6.)
- 👂 Children come into our homes from varied backgrounds. As we learn to tune in to and read their emotions, we have to consider how these factors affect the way children express and interpret feelings. If you've ever been to an emotional event such as a wedding or funeral, you probably noticed that some people express their feelings by rushing right at your personal space and smothering you with hugs and kisses. Others appear standoffish and are uncomfortable with physical contact of any kind, perhaps barely even making eye contact. In such situations, the collision of cultural—and personal—differences can lead to unintended hurt feelings, misunderstandings, perceived insults, or awkward moments. The same holds true for children.
- 👂 Provide realistic reassurance and comfort. We can't guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen to our children again, but we can let them know that we will do everything in our power to help.



For more tips on tuning in to children's emotions, direct participants to page 5-19 of their Participant Handbook, "Tuning in to Your Child's Emotions: Tips for Resource Parents."

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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Tune In (Continued)

Besides tuning in when children are actively sending signals through their behaviors or reactions, you can also help children practice emotional skills in nonthreatening and playful ways.

Some children respond well to regular “check-ins” that give them a chance to assess their feelings in the moment (at breakfast, for example, or when they come home from school).

Tools like the Feelings Thermometer and the “*Make Your Own*” *Feelings Chart* on page 5-21 of the *Participant Handbook* can be very useful for these kind of feelings check-ins.

Games can also be a fun way to help children express a variety of emotions in a stress-free way. Let’s try one.



Let's Play . . . “What’s my emotion?”



Please pair up into teams of two. Try not to pair off with someone you already know well. Once you have your partner, take a minute to decide who will be the actor and who will be doing the guessing.

Give participants a couple of minutes to choose their partners. If there are an uneven number of participants, you can have the extra person join an existing pair.

Once everybody is paired off, circulate around the room and have the “actors” pull a word out of the hat or basket.

This hat contains slips of paper with various emotions written on them. I’d like each of you actors to pick out a slip. Your job will be to get your partner to guess what emotion you are portraying without using any words or sounds. Feel free to use your hands and your body, but don’t use typical charades techniques like the “sounds like” signal. The goal is to look like you’re actually experiencing the emotion. You’ll have 60 seconds.

Once everyone has their slip, give the actors a couple of seconds to think, then cue the group to start the exercise. At the end of 60 seconds, call “time” and poll the group to see how many people were able to identify the emotion their partner was acting out.

Which emotions were easy to portray and to guess? Which were tougher?

Likely responses for “easy” include anger, sadness, fear, surprise. Likely responses for “hard” include embarrassed, shy, proud.

Can you see yourself trying this game with your own family?

There are many commercially available games that are designed to help children identify, express, and control their feelings, as well as excellent storybooks for children of various ages. A partial list of these resources can be found starting on page 5-23 of the *Participant Handbook*.

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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Set an Example

We all know that children learn by example. Children who have been through trauma may have had very little experience with adults who were able to control their emotions. We can show by our example that it is possible to experience emotion without being overwhelmed, and to express emotion without losing control.

- 🗣️ We need to be clear, calm, and consistent in expressing our feelings to the child. That can be hard when faced with some of the challenging behaviors these children can show. But every time we correct a child without flying off the handle, express sadness without retreating into depression, or express disappointment without shaming, we are showing that child not only how to express emotions, but that it is safe to do so.
- 🗣️ Being calm and consistent does not mean being dishonest. You can—and should—let children know if you are feeling hurt, disappointed, or unhappy with something they've done or said, provided you can do it in a calm, non-shaming way.
- 🗣️ Children who have experienced trauma can have particular difficulty understanding mixed emotions, or understanding that they can feel different emotions at the same time (e.g., anger and love towards a birth parent or family member). We can reassure children that it is normal to have mixed emotions about some things, and set an example of how to express and cope with this ambivalence.

[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. Reprinted: July/Aug 2008.
Available at http://www.youthcomm.org/FOUO/Features/JulyAug2008/2008-07_08a.htm

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Read-Aloud Quote

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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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What happened? (Group Activity)



Why do you think A. M. responded the way she did?

What did the foster mother do right?

Have you ever experienced something similar with the children in your care?

Allow five to 10 minutes for discussion before taking a break.



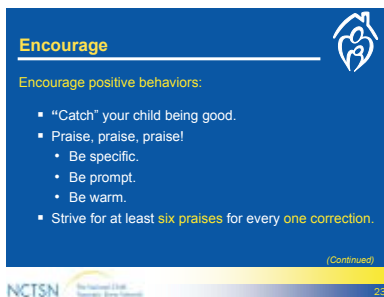
Let's Take a Break!

Announce a 10-minute break.

Remind the group of the location of bathrooms, phones, etc.

Note the current time and the time when the workshop will resume.

During the break, prepare a large bowl of small candies (M&Ms®, Skittles®, or similar) for each of the tables, along with stacks of paper cups (one for each participant sitting at the table).



Encourage

One of the best ways to discourage negative or disruptive behaviors is to encourage positive behaviors. Some children, of course, are more likely to get noticed for their negative behaviors. For them, we may have to be deliberate and creative about noticing and encouraging positive behaviors.

- 🕒 Try to “catch” your child being good—in particular, look for small things that can help build to larger changes.
- 🕒 Provide lots of praise. To be effective, praise must be specific, prompt, and genuine. Vague, insincere, or incomprehensible praise can do more harm than good. Backhanded compliments (e.g., “It’s so nice to see you reading instead of playing those stupid videogames”) will only reinforce the child’s negative beliefs and expectations.
- 🕒 Although it might not be easy, try to maintain a balance of at least six praises for every correction. This kind of positive reinforcement has been shown to be much more effective at shaping children’s behavior than punishment.

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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Encourage (Continued)

The more we can build on the strengths of our children and provide them with a sense of mastery and control, the greater our chances of success when trying to encourage positive behaviors.

- 👉 To enhance children's sense of having control over their own lives, offer choices whenever possible.
- 👉 Give children opportunities to "do it themselves," while always letting them know that you are there to help and take care of them if they need it.
- 👉 Pay attention to the child's interests and special skills, and give support and encouragement as appropriate.
- 👉 Help children develop responsibility and build self-confidence by mastering a new skill that they are interested in. Physical activities might include horseback riding, swimming (especially in the "deep end"), or martial arts. Nonphysical options might include activities such as painting a large wall or mural or playing a large instrument (e.g., cello, piano, drums).

**Taking Stock
(Group Activity)**

In the last week, how many times did you . . .

- Compliment your child for doing something well?
- Say “thank you” to your child?
- Ask your child’s opinion about something?
- Give your child a chance to do something for him- or herself?
- Offer your child options?
- Laugh with your child?

(Continued)

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Taking Stock (Group Activity)

Let’s try a little game.



One facilitator should place a bowl of candies on each table while the other passes around the paper cups.

Think about a particular child currently living in your home. Over the past week, how many times did you:

 **Compliment the child for doing something well?** Really think about it. You can estimate the exact number of times, but try to be honest. Put one candy in the cup for each time you complimented the child.

 **Say “thank you” to the child?**

Give participants a moment to think and collect their candies.

 **Ask the child’s opinion?**

Give participants a moment to think and collect their candies.

 **Give the child a chance to do something for him- or herself?**

Give participants a moment to think and collect their candies.

 **Offer the child options?**

Give participants a moment to think and collect their candies.

 **Laugh with the child?**

Give participants a moment to think and collect their candies. Look around the room and get a sense of how many candies participants have put in their cups.

Looks like there are some pretty full cups out there!

Taking Stock (Continued)

In the last week, how many times did you . . .

- Tell your child to do something?
- Tell your child *not* to do something?
- Tell your child to *stop* doing something?
- Have to impose consequences on your child?
- Ask your child what on *earth* he or she was thinking?

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Taking Stock (Continued)

All right, now let's look at the flip side. As before, you can estimate, but try to be honest. Take out one candy for each incident. For the same child, how many times during the last week did you:

Tell the child to do something?

Give participants a moment to think and remove their candies.

Tell the child NOT to do something?

Give participants a moment to think and remove their candies.

Tell the child to STOP doing something?

Give participants a moment to think and remove their candies.

Have to impose some kind of consequence on the child? (Grounding, time out, etc.)

Give participants a moment to think and remove their candies.

Ask the child WHAT ON EARTH he or she was thinking (or doing)?

Give participants a moment to think and remove their candies.

Look around the room and get a sense of how many candies participants have left in their cups.

Cups aren't quite so full now, are they?

There's no doubt about it, striking a balance between encouragement and correction can be hard when caring for children who have been through trauma. These children can test us in ways we never expected, and it might take a bit of planning and awareness to make sure that we encourage positive behaviors more than we correct negative ones.

One family uses a “prize jar” to recognize what they call “random acts of goodness.” Use a giant pickle or pretzel jar and stock it with little things that will bring a smile to a child’s face. For small children, these might be actual small toys or trinkets or snack items. For older children, they might be “gift certificates” for things like an extra hour of staying up at night or an extra dessert. These prizes can be handed out to children when you catch them “being good.”

It can also be helpful to set up a routine of recognizing and appreciating every member of the family. One family does what they call “pats on the back” at Sunday dinner. They trace a handprint on a sheet of paper and write the words “pat on the back to ____ for ____” inside the shape of the hand. They copy it onto bright-colored paper and have a supply of them in an easily accessible place. Children and adults are encouraged to use them to notice something good someone else has done and write it down anytime during the week. On Sunday night at dinner, these are all read aloud, to much applause.

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?

Achieving a Balance

To achieve a balance between encouragement and correction, keep the child's individual history, interests, and talents in mind. Try to plan specific actions that take into account:

- 🏠 The child's talents, skills, and interests
- 🏠 The areas where you can reasonably give the child some additional control
- 🏠 Fun activities that you can share with the child
- 🏠 The types of praise the child is most likely to appreciate
- 🏠 The kinds of rewards that would be most meaningful to the child

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)

Correct and Build

Despite our best efforts, there still will be times when we need to impose consequences for inappropriate or problematic behavior.

When correcting behaviors and establishing consequences, keep in mind everything we've learned about how trauma affects children's sense of self and their ability to control their emotions and behavior. When correcting children who have experienced trauma, remember to:

- 🗣️ Be clear, calm, and consistent. This means using a calm voice, showing a calm face and body, and using few words.
- 🗣️ Target one behavior at a time. This makes it easier to stay consistent and see results, and will avoid setting children up for failure.
- 🗣️ Avoid shaming or threatening, especially threatening children with removal from the home for bad behavior. This will only serve to confirm the beliefs in their Invisible Suitcases, which will likely escalate bad behavior and become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- 🗣️ As we have discussed, children who have experienced trauma—particularly early and chronic trauma—may act younger than their chronological age. Keep this "developmental" or "emotional age" in mind when you give consequences.
- 🗣️ Pick your battles. Sometimes the most effective option is to leave the behavior to the magic of "natural consequences." For example, when a preteen refused to clean up his room, his foster parents decided to close the door and not look at it anymore.

Sure enough, the day came when the boy discovered that an important homework assignment had been ruined because he'd left it on the floor and spilled soda on it. He had to miss a game he was looking forward to in order to redo the assignment. After the heat of the moment had passed, his parents had a chat with him and helped him come to his own conclusion that keeping his room neat was to his own advantage.

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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Correct and Build (Continued)

Of course, it's not enough just to tell children that something is wrong and impose some type of consequence. To really help our children heal, we need to help them:





- 👉 Understand the connections between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- 👉 Understand the impact of their behaviors. In particular, children need to understand that the behavior is not helpful to THEM, and that they can benefit from changing the behavior.
- 👉 Figure out workable alternatives to problem behaviors.
- 👉 Learn and practice techniques that can help them change negative thoughts and take control of runaway emotions. Much of this work can—and should—be done in concert with other members of your child's team, and particularly with a trauma-informed therapist. (We'll be going into that in greater detail in Module 7.)



- 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?

Dealing with Problem Behaviors (Group Activity)

Let's return to the problem behavior you identified in the Cognitive Triangle for your child. Use the back of the sheet to answer the following questions.

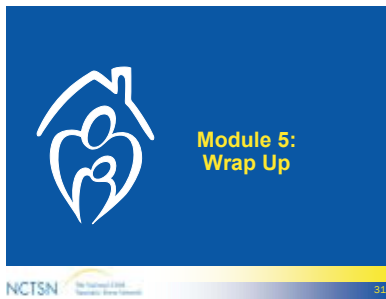
-  **What are the negative effects of this behavior on your child's life?**
-  **How can you help your child to understand these effects?**
-  **What alternatives can you suggest for this behavior?**
-  **What consequences can you set if the behavior continues?**



Ask for up to three volunteers to share their answers with the group. Allow three minutes or so for a larger group discussion/brainstorm on other possible answers to the questions.



This exercise can also be conducted as a small group activity, using Javier (Participant Handbook pages CS-17 and CS-18, "Javier and the iPod®") or James (Participant Handbook page CS-15, "James Refuses to do His Homework") as examples.



Module 5: Wrap Up



Ask each table to choose two *Big Ideas* that they consider to be the most useful or important things that they learned during the session, and to write each idea on an index card.

Give the groups three minutes to discuss and decide on their ideas. One facilitator should serve as timekeeper and give the groups a one-minute warning before calling “time” and collecting the cards.

One facilitator should read from the index cards, while the other notes the ideas on the board or easel. Allow another five to 10 minutes to review, discuss, and condense (if appropriate) the ideas presented into three or four *Big Ideas* for the day. Ask the participants to keep these ideas in mind as they deal with their children in the days before the next module.

Finally, revisit the *Feelings Thermometer* and go around the room checking in. If desired, do a relaxation or stress buster exercise with the group before breaking for the day.

End of Module 5

