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**EPRESS**

***Questions from Directors***

***Over Thanksgiving, we got a new family, and the judge wanted us to have the first visit on the Friday after Thanksgiving Day. We did everything we could with limited staff, but it turned out that we could not accommodate the request, even though we thought we would be able to. Now we have to schedule the first visit, and we feel like we have started off with everyone angry at us – including the children, the judge, the parents, and the lawyers. How do we get back on track?***

First of all, you should know (and remind everyone) that cases don’t always go smoothly when it comes to scheduling. This is a good reminder never to promise clients or children anything that you’re not sure you can deliver. But it was an honest mistake, and you tried valiantly to accommodate everyone. Second, slowing a speeding case down a bit can have benefits in the long run as you determine safety factors and risks involved. I have seen cases in which the program moved too quickly, without following established protocols, to unfortunate ends. For example, parents and lawyers sometimes take advantage of programs that seem very flexible, and corners get cut. This can lead to chaos in trying to get control of the case. It can also be dangerous. Don’t feel guilty, just learn not to make promises you can’t fulfill.

***I have been contacted by a therapist who wants to start a new program that only uses off-site visits at public places. Is there a set of warnings for this type of program?***

Yes, see pages 47 to 49 of the Report to the Florida Legislature.

<http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/clearinghouse/standards-best-practices/>

Also, please have the new person contact me!

***We have a little boy who visits with his father. The father’s new wife just had a baby, and the couple really want the boy to meet his new brother. The father and son have been talking about the baby since the step-mother was pregnant. We want the boy to be able to meet the baby, but the step-mother would have to bring the baby, and the mother (custodian) is adamant that the step-mother is a terrible person and bad influence who does not belong at visits. The boy has asked us several times if the baby can come, and he’s drawn pictures for the baby. What do we do?***

I see your dilemma. If it’s really going to cause that much hostility, why don’t you wait until the father can bring the baby to the visit himself? The baby is a newborn, but in a few weeks his mother can probably breastfeed him and safely hand him off to the father to bring to the visit. Another option is to have the new mother wait in the car or a separate waiting room while the father takes the baby into the visit. Babies are not that interesting or engaging to most children, so a short meet-and-greet visit might be best anyway. If this issue is still a problem, I suggest you go back to court and let the judge make the call. Sometimes clients will not budge until the court rules on paper.

**Videos**

***Below we present more free videos for use with training and as parenting resources.***

**Using Positive Reinforcement** (2:05)- This video describes how to use positive reinforcement to encourage a child’s good behavior, such as picking up his/her toys, flashing a smiling, or giving a hug, extra attention, or an extra privilege that the child has earned.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xDr2tPJCUY>

**Dealing With Tantrums** (2:04)- Dealing with children’s tantrums can be quite difficult, but this video explains strategies to deal with tantrums. The strategies covered include waiting for the child to cool off, ignoring the tantrum, or finding a more private area to talk with your child.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t16TBHWf5ow>

**Handling Aggressive Behavior** (1:45)- This video teaches how to intervene and appropriately discipline your child when they act aggressively towards others. Safety comes first, so intervening is the first important step. Then, comfort the injured child and tell the aggressor that this is bad behavior. Children over 3 can be given a time-out. Teach children phrases about taking turns and identifying their feelings to decrease future aggression.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k69Z30nyUfM>

**Preschoolers and Tantrums** (9:49)- This video covers how to deal with a child’s tantrums using the three D’s: distract, disorient, and disengage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZLX4OT5NmI>

**How to Discipline Children at Different Ages** (3:04)- For 1 to 2 year olds, taking away the temptation, redirecting them, or showing them an appropriate behavior are possible discipline techniques you can use. For 2 to 3 year olds, give them choices and teach consequences. For preschoolers, positively reinforcing their displays of good behavior will likely be the most effective technique.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3iMORZK49U>

**Positive Parenting Solutions with Amy McCready: WHEN-THEN** (10:14)- The positive parenting When-Then method of delaying consequences until tasks are completed can be used from age 2 ½ to teenagers. An example of this method would be to tell your child*,* “When you’ve made your bed, then you can go play.” Choose a privilege your child cares about to delay in order to motivate him or her. When using this method, speak in a calm voice and emphasize the words “When” and “Then”, and don’t give in if the child does not finish the task. This is very different from If-Then, which is bribing the child to complete the task, rather than When-Then, which is expecting the child to complete the task.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrElNi3l7vQ>

**Simple Words to Avoid Power Struggles** (6:46)- Avoiding the use of negative words such as “don’t” or “no” can be an important step to avoiding power struggles. You can then work toward replacing your use of these words with positive words. Negative commands cause children to double process what the parent wants. For example, when a parent says “Don’t jump,” children have to think what it is you do not want them to do and what they should do instead, which is sometimes confusing for a developing brain. Instead of saying “Don’t jump,” a parent can say “Sit down” to relieve confusion. Other ways to avoid power struggles are to find ways to say yes more often and to thank a child in advance for actions you want him/her to do.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZYsRzuqNv8>

**How to Create Structure, Rules, and Expectations for Children**

By Morgan Lodes

Maintaining structure within a family is one of the most important elements to creating family rules and expectations. When parents are considering what kind of rules and expectations to implement, it is important that they understand the three components needed for structure to be successful: consistency, predictability, and follow-through. With these three components, any rule or expectation made by parents can be enforced and followed by each family member. As a supervised visitation provider, you can encourage parents to create structure, rules, and rewards to use in their families by using the following tips to change family dynamics for the better.

**The Three Components of Structure**

The three components needed for effective structure include being consistent with rules and discipline, creating predictability for children on what to expect, and following through with promised consequences. If parents employ these three components effectively, the creation of a family structure is more likely to be effective and successful. As a supervised visitation provider, you can provide the following tips to parents on how to employ the three components of structure in their families.

* **Consistency:** Use similar structure, rules, and discipline methods as often as possible. This helps to teach your child what is expected of him or her. When you reinforce good behaviors on a consistent basis, your child is more likely to regularly display positive behavior.
* **Predictability:** Your child needs to understand that certain actions will bear specific consequences, whether they are good or bad. With predictability, a child will be able to foresee the outcome of different actions, and he or she will be more likely to avoid actions that produce negative consequences.
* In order to be consistent and predictable, you must commit to enforcing the consequences of a given action.
* **Follow-Through:** When assigning discipline to tasks, you need to make sure you can commit and follow-through on the discipline you promise. If your child is not allowed to jump on his or her bed and the consequence for doing so is to have a time-out, you must follow through with the punishment to limit future negative behaviors. Following through on your commitment to teaching your child right from wrong will aid you tremendously in establishing family rules and expectations.

All three of these components are vital to having a structure within a household. Children benefit from structure in families, as they need to know what to expect from their parents in order to feel safe and secure. Structure can also give parents the confidence they need in order to enforce rules and expectations as they are equipped with a plan for how to react to negative behavior choices.

Routines can help create structure and allow for all family members to know what to expect each day. Parents can use a daily schedule, family rule chart, or reward chart to create a visual for the structured system they develop to help the family learn the structure and to provide a daily reminder of rules and expectations. Schedules and charts make it clear to parents and children what exactly they are expected by their family to do during the day, as well as show the rewards they can receive if the tasks and positive behaviors expected of them are accomplished.

**Family Rules**

Family rules are a great way to build structure. A family rule is a specific, simple statement relating to the child behaviors that are acceptable to a parent. Here are some guidelines for creating rules that are specific, respected by all family members, and effective.

* Rules should be adapted to fit the needs of the family. Rules can be specific to a situation, including rules related to how a child should act at dinner or specific to restricted behaviors such as a child not being allowed to run into the house with muddy shoes on.
* Rules should be explained thoroughly to all family members and laid out visually in a chart or poster. When this is done, rules can set the standards for a family and provide expectations that each family member follows and respects, creating a team-like mindset.
* In order for family rules to be effective, parents need to be consistent with enforcing them regularly when they are broken. Parents should follow the rules as well whenever possible to model good behavior.

As a supervised visitation provider, you can remind parents to inform all family members on what the family rules and expected consequences are to create a structured family that communicates well and can react quickly and effectively to negative behavior choices.

**Rewards**

Rewards are necessary to creating a positive system of structure within a family that all members respect and feel comfortable with. When parents give their children rewards for following rules and exceeding expectations, children become more likely to display those positive behaviors. Rewards make children feel encouraged and help to give them higher self-esteem.

Rewards can also improve the relationship between the parent and child. Rewards indicate that the child is acting well and that the parents are pleased with their child’s behavior which means that both parties are respecting one another’s wishes.Rewards can be social or material. While both kinds of rewards can be beneficial for families attempting to create structure in their homes, social rewards are more likely to result in lasting changes in behavior.

**- Material:** Material rewards are any sort of reward that involves giving or buying an object or item for the child. These can be helpful in small doses, but should be limited to avoid dependence on material objects, which can decrease self-encouragement. Examples: Giving a healthy snack once the child has completed his or her homework, promising to buy the child a small toy if he or she behaves for an entire week.

* When using material rewards, it is important to incorporate labeled praise into the reward to let the child know why he or she is receiving a toy or lollipop or the reward will have no meaning to the child and will not lead to an increase in good behavior.

**- Social:** Using social rewards can be extremely effective and useful for many families. Not only are social rewards often free, but they can also create valuable one-on-one time for parents and children. Social rewards are also useful for children to become accustomed to as they are often used in school and places of work to encourage productivity and success. Here are some tips for you to provide to parents to follow when employing social rewards:

* Use affection, such as giving smiles, high-fives, hugs, kisses, or even a simple pat on the back to show support and appreciation of the behavior.
* Employ praise appropriately. For example, you should use *labeled praise* such as “You were a great helper when you threw out your lunch today all by yourself”. Labeled praise tells a child what exactly the parent liked about a certain behavior.
* Limit the use of vague terms. Sometimes the use of vague terms such as “Good job” or “Way to go” can be ambiguous to children. Specify exactly what behavior was appreciated to let your child know what actions or behaviors he or she should display more often.
* Spend extra time with your child. A simple social reward that you can give anytime is to spend special time with your child, giving them attention and your focus. If your child behaves well, allow him or her to join you in an activity such as dinner preparation or decorating the house for a holiday. These types of activities provide much needed bonding-time between parents and children.

Whether parents utilize material or social rewards, they should choose activities or material items that the child enjoys in order for the rewards system to be effective. This will encourage children to strive for good behavior to earn rewards.

It is also important for parents to think innovatively about what rewards will best suit the needs and preferences of their children. At times, parents will need to change the rewards given as children wants and needs will change as they age.

**Conclusion**

Creating structure within a family is pivotal to having a healthy family dynamic. The foundation of structure for families often includes family rules, how those rules are implemented, and a reward system for when rules are followed. As a supervised visitation provider, you can stress to parents the positive impact that a definitive structure has on a family. The foundation of a family is a strong indicator of how well each family member interacts with one another. When there is a healthy and interactional structure within a family, children are able to meet expectations, follow rules, and respect others, giving them the tools necessary for situations throughout their lives.

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<http://findingjoy.net/why-time-more-important-than-stuff/>

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**The Protective Factors: Child Development and Children’s Emotional Maturity**

Teaching Children Communication

By Kayla Kirk

Introduction

Communication skills are vital for adults and children. Studies show that effective communicators are happier, achieve more in school settings, and are more successful overall. Teaching children good communication skills starts immediately and lasts throughout their childhood and adolescence. At different stages of childhood, different skills should be developed. The ultimate goal is to raise an individual who converses courteously, listens to what others say, and is able to clearly express his or her own thoughts, ideas, and opinions. This Epress covers:

* Basic communication practices to teach each age group of children
* Different stages of child communication development
* How to teach children communication skills at each development stage
* Activities to teach children communication skills

Basic Communication Practices

There are a number of things you should do to help facilitate communication in your child. The practices mentioned below can be used with all development stages.

* Actively listen to your child. When you show your child how to listen, this demonstrates that paying attention when someone else is speaking is important and courteous.
* Get on your child’s level. Getting on your child’s level will facilitate good eye contact. Eye contact is important because it is a non-verbal way to communicate with someone that helps to show your interest in what is being shared.
* Display signs of verbal and nonverbal listening. When your child is speaking, not only can you verbally acknowledge what they are saying such as saying “yes,” and “mhmm,” but you can also nod your head and react to what they’re saying with facial expressions.
* Verify that your child listens to you. When talking to your child, ask them to repeat what you said in his or her own words or ask what the child thinks about what you are speaking about. This way you know if your child is actively listening to you, and you can then say, “Thank you for paying attention” to show that you care.
* Use “I” statements to communicate how you think and feel. Start your sentences with “I” instead of “you” to relate what you are thinking. This will teach children how to speak in a direct way to others about their thoughts and reactions.
* Ask probing questions to encourage your child to engage in open communication. By asking probing questions, such as, “You look upset. Is it because of the thunderstorm and you can’t go outside?” your child will learn to communicate more often and new conversation topics can be covered.
* Teach your child not to interrupt when someone else is speaking. Tell your child that allowing others to speak fully and express opinions without being disrupted is courteous. If your child interrupts you, calmly and politely tell him or her not to and explain how this can be a distraction to the person who had first been speaking. Also, don’t interrupt your child either so that you can model this behavior for him or her.

Babies and Toddlers- Birth to Age Three

Language development accelerates between birth and a child’s third birthday. Infants communicate from birth, through sounds (crying, cooing, squealing), facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, grimacing), and gestures (moving legs in excitement or distress). Babies continue to develop communication skills when adults respond to their efforts. From about one to two, children will learn fragments of words and echo what they hear. They may point to something familiar and say its name and often times, they can connect names to familiar faces.

Gestures are a very important part of communication, particularly at this age when language development is minimal. You can make connections with the child by using gestures and language with running commentary. For example, the infant is pointing to the fridge. “Do you want a drink? Do you want milk? I’ll get you some milk. Here is your drink of milk.” By using a running commentary to explain the child’s actions, the child will learn words for his or her gestures and will begin to comprehend the meaning of the gestures. Providing comments on gestures also encourages children to respond and participate in communication.

Once a toddler, the child will start to consistently say words correctly. The child will learn the correct pronunciation and not struggle as much with language. At this age, speak to children slowly and clearly. Employ simple language so that the toddler will be able to understand. Emphasize correct pronunciation, even if the child still lacks the ability to say the word correctly.

Below is the typical progression of language milestones for this age group. If you believe your child is falling behind, report your concerns to a doctor.

* 15-18 Months: The child will be able to say several words.
* 18 Months: The child will point to things and know the names of familiar objects.
* 2 Years Old: The child will be able to say 50 or more words and can put two words together to form a small sentence.
* 2 Years or Older: This age child will be able to follow two-step commands.

Preschool Age –Three to Five Years of Age

At this stage, children begin to use more complicated sentences. “No” and “why” typically become very popular words. “No” is used to show individuality and “why” is used to question the confusing adults and world surrounding the child. Children at this age like to participate in decisions, so make sure to ask them questions about what they would like to happen when possible so that they feel included.

This age group will imitate the words you use, so it is a great time to incorporate new vocabulary. A child may be repetitive, describing the same event over and over, due to trying to understand what he or she experienced. When preschool-age children use repetition, ask questions and respond to what they are saying. Get on their physical level and make eye contact so that they feel understood. Also at this age, children talk through their bodies, play, and art. You can learn just as much about what they are communicating by watching them as you do through talking to them. Activities you can use to facilitate learning communication skills with this age child include playing pretend with the child, communicating with dolls or action figures, and reading together.

School Age –Six to Twelve Years of Age

At this time, children begin to speak in a more mature fashion. They want their growth and maturity to be acknowledged and no longer want to be talked down to or treated as a baby. The best way to communicate with children at this age is to ask specific, open-ended questions. Instead of asking, “How was school?” ask “What feedback did your teacher give you on your assignment?” Employing specifically targeted, open-ended questions will usually lead to the child communicating more directly, rather than responding with short, vague answers. It is also helpful to repeat what a child says to ensure that you understand what the child is trying to say. When repeating what the child says, you can do it in a more mature manner so that they can learn from you. This is about the time that children begin to give presentations at school, so help your child prepare by working on eye contact and vocabulary together. At this age, you can facilitate learning by reading together, asking about details from school, and respecting your child’s wish to communicate more like an adult.

Teenagers- Thirteen to Eighteen Years of Age

When your child becomes a teenager or adolescent, teaching communication skills becomes more advanced. It can be challenging because many teens communicate through text, email, instant messenger, and social media. At this age, it is vital they understand rhythm and tone of speech, body language, and different communication styles.

* Rhythm and Tone of Speech: Rhythm involves the speed and frequency of speech. Teach your teenager that talking too quickly can limit others from understanding the communication efforts. Similarly, speaking too slowly or using filler words such as “um” and “like” can lead to distractions and misunderstandings for the listener. The tone of speech is also critical, as it can translate how someone feels or what the individual thinks about what he or she is saying. If your teenager frequently uses a sarcastic tone, particularly with individuals who do not use sarcasm, others might believe that he or she is rude or unfriendly.
* Body Language: Body language is another method people use to help identify how someone thinks or feels. Explain to your teenager that slouching, yawning, or fidgeting can appear as effects of boredom. Crossing arms, rolling eyes, or avoiding eye contact can also often appear rude and distant. Teach your teenager how to sit and stand in a relaxed and approachable way that indicates his or her feelings of eagerness, interest, and openness to communication.
* Communication Style: There are three types of communication styles: passive, assertive, and aggressive. Passive communication involves apologizing, not speaking real thoughts or feelings, and being hesitant or indirect. Assertive communication involves being confident, respecting others, and speaking real thoughts and feelings openly. Aggressive communication is often described as domineering, abrasive, or bossy. Explain to your teenager that being assertive is the best way to talk to others because it shows respect but also allows for real thoughts to be expressed. Being passive or aggressive can make others uncomfortable and lead to unhealthy modes of communication.

Teenagers will have many of the basics of communication down by now. At this point, fine-tuning skills and developing more advanced communication styles are often the focal points of communication development. The way adolescents learn to talk and listen during their teenage years will translate into how they communicate as an adult.

Activities for Each Age Group

Below are names and descriptions of different activities you can use with your child to facilitate communication skills, broken down by the different developmental stages.

*Infants*

Mimicking Sounds: It has been shown that repeating basic sounds and words to your infant helps with language development. When your child makes a sound, repeat it. Repeat sounds back and forth frequently and consistently to help develop motor skills. Give them praise and show how happy you are when the child repeats you.

*Preschool Age*

Co-create a Story: You start off a story and have your child finish it. For very young children, you can tell them a nursery rhyme and have them make up an alternate ending or add on to the story. You could make it more difficult by switching off speaking one sentence and continuing the story in that manner. This exercise is great for teaching beginning verbal communication skills.

*School Age*

Telephone: This old elementary school game is a fun way to develop your child’s listening skills. One participant starts by whispering a sentence into the closest person’s ear. Next, that person will whisper what he or she heard to the next neighbor, and so on and so forth. The last person to get the message repeats it aloud for the group to hear. How similar was it to the original message? The better the listener, the more correct the sentence will be. Begin with a simpler message for younger children and gradually increase the size and complexity as they get older.

*Teenagers*

Role Plays: Give your child a situation and have them act it out in each of the three communication styles (passive, assertive, aggressive). Ask which one the child thinks was the most effective for the situation and give guidance so that the child realizes how he or she interacts with others.

Um Contest: Have your teenager talk about a familiar topic, such as his or her favorite activity, movie, or sport. See how long he or she can keep from uttering “um,” “er,” “uh,” “like,” or “ya’ know” while describing the topic. This develops the child’s confidence, as well as eloquence of speaking. Eliminating these filler words will allow your teenager to focus on becoming more articulate and increasing his or her vocabulary.

Conclusion

Teaching communication can begin immediately and is a process that continues into adulthood. Giving your children lessons and practice on the correct basics of communication will help them as they get older. Being a good communicator will help them in relationships and career success as an adult. Communication is a vital skill in understanding others and being understood.

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**How to Build Confidence in Children**

By Morgan Lodes

Instilling confidence in a child may be one of the most important roles a parent holds when it comes to his or her children. Confidence is essential to developing relationships, succeeding in school, and viewing the world in a positive way. Further, having confidence during the times of difficulty, self-discovery, and development children are sure to face can help to limit the negative effects external influences can have on a child’s growth. As a supervised visitation provider, you can instruct parents on how to better instill a strong sense of self in their children by following these tips and guidance.

**A Parent’s Role**

Parents who follow these tips and strategies can help their children learn to be confident by modeling the examples set in front of them. When parents are able to display a good sense of self-confidence, their children have good examples to model their own confidence from. It is also important to keep in mind that every child varies in confidence levels. While some children may exhibit confident tendencies, such as taking control of a play area or asking for something when they want it, other children may naturally be more passive in their requests and needs. It is important to first evaluate a child’s confidence level to determine his or her starting point. Then parents can use the following tips to promote growth and positive development of a child’s lifelong confidence level.

1. **Let your child take control of the situation.**

Do not complete easy assigned tasks for your child, like completing a school project or writing an assigned essay for him or her, as this limits the development of confidence. Children must learn that they have the ability to successfully complete a task on their own. The only way to teach self-reliance to a child is to give him or her opportunities to reach goals and complete tasks individually.

*Example*: *If your child has a school project that is due soon, you can sit down with your child and organize his or her ideas on paper. Create a game plan together, and make sure your child sticks to the plan and accomplishes the task by him or herself. Try your best to not intervene and to let your child overcome challenges individually.*

1. **Use constructive criticism**

Of course not every project or task completed by your child will be perfect, but praise and criticism should be used properly to encourage your child to perform better and feel proud of his or her work. Limit the overuse of criticism when appropriate, as too much criticism can damage a child’s confidence. Constructive criticism involves providing positive feedback that educates a child to improve upon his or her actions or behaviors. Constructive criticism should not hurt a child’s feelings because this type of critique is meant to develop a child’s skills in a more effective and helpful way that negative critiques. While using constructive criticism, you can use statements of praise like “Nice try!” to encourage you child and limit feelings of defeat.

*Example: When your child does not perform well on a test, ask him or her questions about what was challenging and suggest ways that will help him or her study more effectively next time. If your child performs well on a test or activity, show your appreciation and encouragement by saying, “Wow! You did great on your test! You should be proud of yourself for dedicating so much time to studying and understanding the material.” or “The way you made your poster for class is so beautiful and really gets your idea across. Good job!” Statements of constructive criticism and praise help show children that THEY have the power to perform well and to change habits if they need to in order to produce desired results.*

1. **Encourage self-respect and positive thoughts**

It is vital that children learn how to internalize positive thoughts and feelings. When children are able to comfort themselves with a supportive attitude and high self-respect in challenging or upsetting situations, it enables them to work through those hard times and keep their confidence. Everyone in life faces times in which negative thoughts arise, such as guilt, shame or embarrassment but having confidence can combat those destructive feelings. Ultimately, confidence can keep a child strong and optimistic during the toughest and most challenging of times.

*Example: When children get frustrated at activities, discourage children from speaking negative self-worth such as, “I just can’t do it” or “I’m not good enough” because these statement perpetuate a devaluing of their self-worth and true potential. As parents, you should remind them that they CAN achieve anything they want to as long as they try their best. You can say things like “You’ve got this, you’re almost there!” or “Why don’t we take a break to think about what we can try instead and then come back to this later?” in order to reassure them that they have the ability to do whatever task is in front of them. If you are able to teach your child to remain composed and confident during frustrating challenges, your child will be able to naturally learn how to be positive and optimistic when he or she is alone and has to overcome a difficult task independently.*

1. **Promote your child’s interests and skills**

First, you must understand what it is that your child finds satisfying and fun. The better understanding you have of what your child’s interests and skills are, the better you are equipped to identify activities that you feel will develop their individual talents best. As a parent, remember that not every child will like the same thing. It is necessary for children to know that their parents support them regardless of what they like to do in their spare time. As parents, find beauty in whatever it is that your child likes to do, whether it is playing video games or reading books.

*Example: If your child loves to play video games, challenge him or her to explore further into the games. Ask your child questions about how the game designers create the characters in the game or how the layout of the game got to be the way it is. Asking children questions that dig further may instill a curiosity within them that inspires them to learn more about the activity they love to do. Soon, your child will become an expert in the world of gaming because you were able to support them and nurture their unique passions and interests. Just taking the time to find out what your child’s interests are can give him or her the confidence needed to pursue whatever it is that he or she loves to do.*

**Support Is Key!**

Ultimately, parents need to understand that in order for children to build confidence they must first feel that others have confidence in them and parents can act as the first to express that to them, as well as a constant reminder of this confidence. Parents can show that they have confidence in their children in a variety of ways. First, parents can give their children more responsibility by letting them complete an assigned task on their own (For example, chores or homework). Next, parents can provide constructive criticism that guides children in the right direction and gives them the confidence needed to complete a task independently.

As parents continue to work with their child on building confidence, they can gain a better understanding of what their child’s interests and passions are. With that knowledge, parents can then support their children by encouraging them to become more involved in those rewarding activities. Through a parent’s loving support and instructive direction, children will learn to build confidence as individuals. Therefore, building confidence in a child begins with a parent’s involvement in their child’s interests, and then continues on with a child’s commitment to maintaining a positive self-image and prioritizing one’s self-worth.

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**Trauma Informed Care**

**Effects of Losing a Pet on Children**

**By Kayla Kirk**

**Introduction**

The death or loss of a pet for a child can be a difficult time. Children develop strong attachments to companion animals, and many times, this is the first death a child experiences. During this time it is important for parents to give support and guidance to their children. As a supervised visitation monitor, you can explain to parents how children at different ages will interpret and react to death and provide strategies that children can use to mourn and remember the pet in a positive way. In this training you will learn:

* How children at different ages interpret and react to death
* Questions children may ask
* Ways to mourn and remember a pet
* When to get a new pet

**How Children at Different Ages Interpret and React to the Loss of a Pet**

How a child responds to the death or loss of a pet depends on the strength of the bond between the child and pet, as well as the child’s age and developmental stage. Below are the different age groups of children and how they interpret and react to the loss of a pet. Children younger than the age of 2 usually do not have a strong, lasting reaction to losing a pet.

**2 to 3 Years:** Children at this stage should be told the pet has died and will not return. Reassure the child that they did not do or say something to cause the death of their pet. Children at this age can sense your emotions and will copy them. It is important that you maintain routines. Children at this age will usually accept a new pet easily.

**4 to 6 Years:** At this age, children have some understanding of death. They may not comprehend its permanence; they may believe the pet is just asleep. It is important to explain that the child’s past anger or behavior towards the pet is not responsible for its death. Children may have bowel or bladder disturbances during this time or changes in their play, eating, or sleeping habits. Children at this age should be allowed to express their feelings and ask questions. It may be helpful for them to draw pictures of the pet and write stories.

**7 to 9 Years:** Children at this age understand that death is irreversible. They may become worried about their parents death and ask morbid questions. They are curious, but it is important to be frank and honest. Their grief can translate into school problems, anti-social behavior, physical withdrawal, aggression, or clingy behavior. As mentioned above, it is good to reassure these children that they did not cause the death of their pet.

**10 to 11 Years:** At this age children understand that death is natural, inevitable, and happens to all living things. They will react similar to adults and may even model their parent’s grief. The death of a pet may trigger recollections of previous losses, and parents should be open for discussion about death.

**Adolescents:** Adolescents react very similarly to adults. Their reactions range from a total lack of concern to a hyper-emotional state. Peer approval is important to them. They need to find their own feelings and may be prone to start conflict with a parent.

**Questions Children May Ask**

Children may ask a lot of questions after the death of a pet. It is important to tell parents that they should answer their children’s questions as honestly as possible. A simple answer can usually satisfy a child’s question. Parents can include their religious or philosophical views to explain death to their child or children. When parents don’t know the answer, it is ok for them to say they don’t know. Below are common questions children ask after the death of a pet.

* Why did he/she die?
* Where did he/she go?
* Will we ever see him/her again?
* Is he/she with God?
* Can he/she hear us?

It is best to speak in honest terms, at an appropriate level of detail for the child's age. Very small children need to know that this is final - the pet isn't going to wake up or come back; to say that the pet "went away" without offering any other details can confuse children. Older children need to know the reasons why the pet died to be able to fully understand and process the loss.

It is important to never belittle or ignore the child's relationship with the deceased pet. To say phrases such as "it was just a goldfish” or “we can get a new one tomorrow" does not address the child's grief or teach the child the importance of the human-animal bond. It does not matter how small or insignificant the pet may seem to adults.

**Ways to Mourn the Pet**

Having a burial, memorial, or similar ceremony helps to reinforce the importance of the pet's life and mark the death event. Children should be allowed to participate in whatever way is appropriate. Below are ways that children can mourn and memorialize the pet.

**Draw Pictures of the Pet:** Have the child draw pictures of their pet and share what the picture means to them. A picture can be kept in the child’s room or hung somewhere visible in the house so the child has a positive memory of the pet.

**Create a Scrapbook:** Take photos from when the pet was alive and put them in a scrapbook. Write memories such as humorous stories or sweet anecdotes next to the pictures. This is a book the child can look at whenever they want to be reminded of the good times they spent with their pet.

**Have a Burial Ceremony:** If the family decides to bury the pet, have the child involved in the burial. Ask the child where they think the pet should be buried, wrap the pet in their favorite blanket, or bury them with their favorite toy. Have the child make a marker for the burial site or speak a few words during the burial.

**Scatter the Ashes:** If the family has the pet cremated, have the child involved in whether the ashes are scattered or kept in an urn. If the ashes are to be scattered, have the child chose the pet’s favorite place outside as the location.

There are many different ways to mourn and remember a family pet. The most important thing to keep in mind is to involve the child. Let the child mourn and remember their pet in the way that best suits them individually.

**When to Get a New Pet**

Deciding to buy a new pet is a very personal choice. It should not be rushed or done to help children "get over" the deceased pet. One pet does not replace another and getting a new pet too soon may only cause the child to resent the new pet. Only once the child can speak openly about the deceased pet and shows interest in a new pet should the subject of a new pet be discussed.

**Conclusion**

A child is greatly affected by a loss of a pet. It is important to tell parents how to talk to their children when a pet is dying or has recently passed. Many times this is the first death a child will experience and the loss of a pet can be as traumatic as the loss of a person. Mourning the pet should be discussed with the child, and grief should be allowed and understood.

**Resources**

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss/helping-your-child-when-the-family-pet-dies>

<http://aplb.org/services/children.html>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/pet_death.html>

<http://rainbowsbridge.com/grief_support_center/grief_support/chrildren_and_petloss.htm>

**Florida’s Public Records Law: An Overview**

**Introduction**

Many people don’t realize that because of Florida’s broad public records law, every individual, partnership, corporation or other private entity acting on behalf of a public agency must sign a contract requiring them to comply with public records law. This includes non-profits such as supervised visitation programs that enter into agreements with the court.The resulting responsibilities are laid out in s.119.071 of the Florida Statutes. In general, contractors who enter into a contract for services with a public agency must:

* keep and maintain public records which the public agency needs to perform its services
* provide public access to public records on the same terms as the public agency and at no additional cost
* make sure that confidential records exempt from public records requests are not disclosed except as authorized by law
* meet all requirements for retaining public records
* transfer, at no cost, all public records to the public agency at the end of the contract and destroy any confidential or exempt duplicates
* provide all records stored electronically to the public agency in a format that is compatible with that agency’s information systems (F.S. §119.0701(2)(a)-(d))

**What Materials Are Public Records?**

Public records are:

"All documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software or other material, regardless of physical form, or characteristics, or means of transmission, made or receivedpursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency." (F.S.§199.011(12).)

The Florida Supreme Court interprets this definition broadly to include all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business. This includes:

* personnel records, unless exempted by law, including applications, resumes, third party communications (such as references), salary information and grievance records
* memoranda, drafts and proposals, whether they are final or non-final and whether or not they have been communicated to anyone (there is no “unfinished business” exception)
* emails and all other electronic information, including text messages, made or received in connection with official business (Sunshine Manual, p.54, http://myfloridalegal.com/webfiles.nsf/WF/KGRG-8RAQUF/$file/2012-SunshineManual.pdf)

**Responding to a Public Records Request**

Any person (whether they are a reporter, attorney, union representative, public employee or other citizen) may request public records in writing or orally, and they do not need to show a purpose or “legitimate” need for them. (F.S. §119.01(1)). The custodian must acknowledge the request promptly and then arrange a time for the requestor to view them or receive copies. (F.S. §119.07(1)(a)). They may designate another employee to gather the requested documents. (F.S. §119.07(b)). They must do so in a reasonable amount of time depending on the circumstances and in good faith. Good faith means making reasonable efforts to find out whether the records exist and where they can be accessed. (F.S. §119.07(c)).

**If Records, or Portions of Records, Are Exempt**

If an exemption applies to the record (see below), the person in custody of it must redact the exempt portion and provide the remainder of the record. (F.S. §119.07(d)). “Redact” means to conceal from a copy of an original public record, or to conceal from an electronic image that is available for public viewing, that portion of the record containing exempt or confidential information. (F.S. §119.011(13)).

If all or part of the record is exempt from disclosure, they must say why it is exempt and give a citation to the statute exempting it. If the requestor asks, the person in custody of the record must state in writing and in detail why the record is exempt or confidential. Records can be made available by email or other remote electronic means. (F.S. §119.07(e)).

**Photographs**

Requestors can also ask for access to public records in order to take photographs of them under supervision of the employee in custody of the records. (F.S. §119.07(3)(a)). The employee, known as the” custodian of the records,” may enforce reasonable rules concerning the photographing of records. (F.S. §119.07(3)(c)). Records must be photographed in the room where they are kept, or, if that’s not practical or possible, in the closest available place or room. Supervision services during photographing must be provided at an agreed upon rate, or at a rate determined by the custodian of the records if an agreement cannot be reached. (F.S. §119.07(3)(d)).

**Copy Fees**

For copies of documents not larger than 14 by 8.5 inches, public agencies and contractors can charge 15 cents per copy, and no more than 5 additional cents for each two-sided copy. They may charge up to $1 per certified copy. If a request requires extensive use of time and resources, they can require a reasonable special service charge. (F.S. §119.07(4)).

**Exemptions to Public Records Law**

Some categories of information are exempt and need to be redacted before records are released to the public. The most frequently encountered types are listed below:

* All Social Security Numbers (F.S. §119.071(4)(a)).
* Examination answers and question sheets for the purpose of licensure (F.S. § 119.071(1)(a))
* Certain financial records, including any financial statement that an agency requires a prospective bidder to submit in order to prequalify for bidding is exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. (F.S. § 119.071(1)(c))
* Public records prepared by an attorney for civil, criminal and administrative proceedings (F.S. § 119.071(4)(d)(1))
* Medical and insurance records (HIPPA)
* Certain employees’ home addresses, telephone numbers, and photos (F.S. § 119.071)
* Employee drug test results (F.S. § 112.0455)
* Reports of abuse of children, disabled adults, or elderly persons and materials generated as a result of the report (F.S. §§ 39.202 and 415.107)
* Discussion and all work products of collective bargaining (F.S. § 447.307(2))
* Risk management claims file or meeting minutes relating to claims (F.S. § 768.28)
* Driver’s License Photos must be redacted unless there's a government purpose as specified under F.S. § 322.142 (4).
* Bank account numbers and debit, charge, and credit card numbers held by an agency are exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. (F.S. § 119.071(5)(b))
* A security system plan as well as building plans, blueprints and other diagrams of internal layout and structural elements of a building owned by an agency is exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution.
* Documents protected by copyright and trade secret laws (F.S. § 815.04(3))

(Exemptions list in part courtesy of Department of Children and Families and Department of Management Services)

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**May an agency impose a waiting period or establish a specific time period for access to public records?**

No. The only delay permitted in producing records is the reasonable amount of time it takes to retrieve the record and delete any exempt portions.

**Q: May an agency require that a request for records be made in writing or that the requester furnish background information?**

No. A custodian must honor a request for copies of records whether the request is in writing, over the telephone, or in person, as long as the required fees are paid. A requester cannot be required to disclose his/her name, address, or telephone number unless this information is required by law. If a public agency believes it is necessary to document a request for public records, the agency may require the custodian to complete the appropriate document.

**Q: Must a person give a reason for his/her request?**

No. The Public Records Law does not require a person to show a purpose or "special interest" as a condition of access to public records.

**Q: May an agency refuse to allow inspection or copying of public records on the grounds that the request is "overbroad"?**

No. A custodian is not authorized to deny a request for access to public records because it is not specific enough. If a request is insufficient to identify the records, the agency has the duty to notify the requester promptly that more information is needed. Unless there is a statutory exemption, a custodian must produce the records requested regardless of the number of documents involved or any inconvenience. The agency is authorized, however, to charge a reasonable fee, in addition to the actual cost of duplication, for the cost of extensive use of technology resources or personnel if required by the nature or volume of the request.

**Q: May an agency refuse a request because portions of the record requested contains exempt information?**

No. If a record contains information which is exempt from public disclosure, the custodian must delete that which is exempt and provide a copy of the remainder. Also, if so requested, a custodian must state in writing the statutory citation authorizing the deletion.

**Q: Is an agency required to answer questions or create a summary regarding contents of public records?**

No. The Public Records Law does not require an employee to answer questions regarding details of the contents of records or to excerpt or interpret them for the public. However, an agency must respond to all requests for any information about copying costs.

**Q: Is an agency required to produce records in a particular form?**

An agency is not ordinarily required to produce records in a particular form. For example, if they keep a chronological list of vendors, a requester cannot require the department to reorganize the information by geographic area. However, they are required to provide a copy of a public record in any medium maintained by the agency.

**Q: Is an agency required to comply with a request for records stored in a computer?**

Yes. Information stored in a computer is as much a public record as written pages in a book or file folders, and are governed by the same rules as other public records. An agency that maintains a public record in an electronic recordkeeping system must provide a copy of a requested record in the medium requested if the agency maintains the record in that medium.

**Q: May an agency refuse a request to inspect or copy the agency's records on the grounds that they are not in its possession?**

No. An agency is not authorized to refuse to allow inspection of its public records on the grounds that the documents are in the actual possession of someone else. Public records may not be removed from the place where they are ordinarily expected to be kept, except for reasonable business purposes. If the records are with the General Counsel's office, obviously consult with the Office of the General Counsel.

**Q: May an agency charge a fee for the mere inspection of public records?**

Not unless the compilation of same is time consuming. Public records must be open for public inspection without charge unless otherwise expressly provided by law. But if the volume of records to be inspected is large, requiring the extensive use of agency resources, a special service charge could be applied. It is irrelevant whether the requested public record is a written document, a videotape, or information stored in a computer. Providing access is a statutory duty of all records custodians. It is not a revenue-generating operation.

**Q: What fees may be charged for copies of public records?**

Agencies are permitted to provide copies of public records without charge. An agency may, however, charge for copies, as long as the fee does not exceed that established by law. If no other fee is set in the statutes, the custodian may charge up to 15 cents per one sided page for paper copies that are 8 1/2 by 14 inches, or smaller, and no more than 20 cents for two sided duplicated copies. Up to $1.00 per page may be charged for certified copies. For other copies, the charge is limited to the actual cost of duplication. The phrase "actual cost of duplication" is defined to mean "the cost of the materials and supplies used to duplicate the record, but it does not include the labor and overhead cost . . . ." No fees designed to recoup the original cost of developing or producing the records may be charged. An agency may also charge a reasonable fee, based on actual costs incurred, for the extensive use of agency resources.

**Q.: How long must an agency retain a public record?**

Whoever has custody of public records must give them to his/her successor at the expiration of his/her term or, if there is no successor, to the records and information management program of the Division of Library and Information Services of the Department of State. Florida law requires agencies to give the Division a list or schedule of records that are no longer needed in the transaction of business and that do not have enough administrative, legal, fiscal, or historic significance to justify keeping them. The Division has rules, binding all agencies, concerning the disposal of public records.

The Florida Department of State publishes a records retention schedule which is accessible at: http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/recordsmgmt/gen\_records\_schedules.cfm

**Q: Does a requestor need to show a "legitimate interest" in my public records e-mail before being allowed to see it?**

No. Any person has the right to request to see a public record for any reason.

**Q: Does a requestor have the right to conduct a "fishing expedition" and make "overbroad" requests?**

Yes. The law does not require the requestor to specify a particular document. You may want to seek clarification and guidance when responding to any "overbroad" requests to seek advice on how to have the request narrowed. Then the request is sent for an estimate of cost.

**Q: May I refuse to respond to a public records request because I just don't have the time to gather the documents?**

No. However, if responding to a public records request requires a substantial amount of time, the law allows you to charge the requestor for the cost of that time.

**Q: How do I determine what information is exempt from the public records law?**

If you are unsure about a piece of information, it’s a good idea to contact an attorney.

**Q: Am I required to produce personal, non-business-related e-mail upon request?**

You may be required to, or it may be included in other responses. Only e-mail made or received pursuant to law or in connection with the transaction of official state business must be produced, however this can sometimes prove problematic in excluding personal e-mail randomly mixed into production.

**Q: How quickly must I respond to a public records request?**

The law requires you to respond within a reasonable time, which will depend on the nature of the request. However, the courts have made it clear that public records are to be given attention.

**Q: May I require requestors to put public records requests in writing?**

No. Oral public records requests are as valid as written requests. However, you may ask for the request to be placed in writing so there are no misunderstandings about what is sought. If the requestor refuses, offer to write the request down and read it back to them so that a written record is maintained.

**Q: Must I produce my public record e-mail in a particular format?**

No. You are only required to produce existing records. The law does not require you to create new records.

**Q: Does the public records law require me to answer questions regarding the content of public record?**

No. You are only required to produce the documents. You do not have to answer any questions, although at times it may helpful to do so.

**Q: If the person who sent me a public record e-mail asked me to keep it confidential, can I refuse to produce it?**

No. If a document is a non-exempt public record, it must be produced upon request, even if the sender has asked that it be kept confidential.

**Q: What happens if I refuse to turn over a public record upon request?**

A person who knowingly violates the public records law is subject to disciplinary action and may be found guilty of a criminal law violation.

**Q: If I keep public records at my house instead of my office, must I still produce them upon request?**

Yes. All non-exempt public records must be produced regardless of where they are physically located.

**Q: What if the requested document contains exempt and public material? Can I withhold the entire document?**

Not usually. When possible, the law requires us to delete the portion of the document that is exempt and provide the document to the requestor. If this is not possible, the requestor may need to pay for a copy of the records which can be redacted for production.

(FAQ courtesy of Department of Management Services)

Appendix: Earlier this year we discussed how to identify a child’s strengths, but here are some more ways to explore parental strengths.

**Strength-Based Practice**

Helping Parents Identify their Strengths

*This exercise is a helpful one for intake, when discussing parent’s strengths and challenges.*

How Are You Strong?

There were good things about you before you had children, but having children often makes you want to be a better role model. Raising children makes parents stronger. The list below gives different strengths you may have. Look at the list and circle the strengths you have. Then list the top five strengths you feel most confident about below.

**Creative Fair Confident Eager to Learn**

**Loyal Focused Forgiving Don’t give up**

**Caring Calm Passionate Patient**

**Hard-working Humble Spiritual Imaginative**

**Lots of Friends Close family Happy Goal-oriented**

**Positive Healthy Loving Positive**

**Honest Funny Sensitive Want to do better**

**Leader Curious Striving Self-controlled**

**Hopeful Supportive Dependable Trustworthy**

**Strength #1: ­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Strength #2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Strength #3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Strength #4: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Strength #5: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Discussion Questions

Ask yourself these questions about the strengths you identified and write your responses below. Take this time to think on your personal strengths and how you can appreciate and grow them.

1. Is there a strength you feel you have developed that surprised you? Why do you think you were not able to recognize it before?
2. How would you describe yourself if someone asked you about your life? What strengths would come to mind in your description? Do you feel a particular strength is central to your personal identity?
3. Think of a situation you did not handle well, and identify what strengths could have been useful during that time. How might this have changed the outcome of the situation?
4. Was there strength you do not feel you currently have, but would like to develop in your life? What are some ways you could start to practice this strength?

How Has Being a Parent Changed You?

Think about what you were like before you had children. Now how have you changed by being a parent? Below are some different ways you may have changed as you raise your children. Read each statement and underline any you feel are true. Then write down the top three ways you feel you have grown.

## Relationships

* I can count on others in times of trouble.
* I am more caring.
* I value my friends and family more.
* I show support to others.
* I put more effort into relationships.

## Personal Development

* I have found that I am stronger than I thought I was.
* I am better able to solve problems.
* I am better able to accept my life.
* I have more confidence.
* I am more reliable and dependable.
* I have greater courage when facing new situations.

## New Meanings

* I have a better understanding of what I believe.
* What I think is important has changed.
* I can take on difficulties.
* I have a stronger religious faith.
* I believe my life is important.

## New Possibilities

* I am more likely to change things that need to be changed.
* I have found new interests and hobbies.
* I am able to do better things with my life.

The #1 way I have grown: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The #2 way I have grown: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The #3 way I have grown: ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_