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Fostering Success in School By Rick Delaney, Ph.D.



Many foster parents contend with problems related to their children and the schools they attend. The facts are that foster children trail behind their non-foster peers in school. For a variety of

reasons, higher numbers of foster children and adolescents have poor attendance rates, perform below grade level, show behavior and discipline problems, and qualify for special education. Foster youth often repeat a grade and drop out at twice the rate of their peers.

Here's how Mr. and Mrs. Akers describe their situation:

We have our first foster child, a 12-year-old boy named John. He has been in several foster homes and his birth parents moved a lot when he lived with them. He has attended at least 11 schools in his short career. He is a bright kid but he has two major problems: he does not get along with other kids at school and he will not do his homework. John sets himself up for rejection by other kids. Maybe he expects they will not like him and then guarantees it by the way he treats them. He also refuses to do any homework unless we stand over him for hours. Then he does not turn it in

the next day. Go figure! We are in daily consultation with the school. They call with the latest problem or fight; they also put some pressure on us to get John to perform better.

Why Do Foster Children Often Struggle In School?

Children like John struggle in school for a variety of reasons. First, most of these kids have been victims of maltreatment. As a result, they have been taken from their biological parents and have been placed in foster care, an additional stressful experience. About 30 percent of children in foster care suffer from significant emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and/or developmental problems, most of which are undoubtedly related to a history of maltreatment and the dislocation of out-of-home placement. Physical (and dental) health problems are also common.

Second, more than just reading, writing and arithmetic consume the minds of foster children. They often blame themselves for the abuse they suffered; they pine for a return to their family -- even if they were maltreated. They experience the limbo of waiting for someone to adopt them. They feel

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Question of the Week

Free feature now available at FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM

The Question of the Week is designed and written by Dr. Rick Delaney of the FPC faculty. Each week, a new question focusing on a different aspect of foster care offers a quick and fun way to test yourself and keep up to date on parenting issues and trends. Here is an example from Week One.

Q. Mr. and Mrs. Jeffers are foster parents of Gil, a seven-year-old sexually abused boy. His birth parents are addicted to methamphetamine and "partied" a lot with friends at night in the home. The Jeffers tried to make Gil feel at home, at first they gave ...

To view the complete question of the week visit: FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM

Fostering Success in School

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powerless about the moves they make from one foster home to another. Many struggle with allegiance issues, torn between love of birth family and growing attachments with their foster family. Insecurity and uncertainty about the future surrounds them daily. Bedeviled by all these worries and sentiments, it is no wonder they lose focus in class and place school at the bottom of their priorities. After expending so much energy worrying about survival, absent families and getting along with their foster parents, schoolwork and failing grades may seem a bit trivial.

Third, frequent foster home moves and corresponding school changes force children and youth in care to adapt to many different schools, rules, courses and teachers. Transferring from one school to another, and perhaps still another, hampers fitting in at their present school and connecting with teachers and other students. As the new-kids-on-the-block, they may be either withdrawn or aggressive in relationships as a way of protecting themselves or avoiding the stigma of being a foster child. They might use disruptive or defiant behavior to get attention or to save face, or they might reject others as a form of "pre-emptive strike," expecting to be rejected themselves. Sometimes, social withdrawal allows foster children to prevent shame and avoid or escape harassment or bullying.

Can we change this? Yes!

Of course, schools can and must do better. Teachers of foster children can teach and support them more effectively if they know about the unique, complicated issues that foster children and their families face and how these issues affect learning. Teachers and other school personnel need to know about the importance of working with foster parents for the benefit of the student. Some foster children have significant behavioral disorders and act out at school;

teachers need tools to handle these problems adequately. Teachers should have access to background information and past school records as soon as possible to improve their ability to teach and support foster children and youth.

However, teachers are not daytime foster parents. It is important for foster parents also to help their children be successful. Here's how you can help your foster child(ren):

- ▶ Stay involved with the school. Get to know your child's teacher and take part in parent-teacher conferences and school activities.
- ▶ Stay current. Find out exactly how your child is doing academically, behaviorally and socially as early and as often as possible.
- ▶ Advocate for your foster child's education. Learn about your child's educational rights and be persistent about obtaining services that address any of his or her learning or behavioral disabilities.
- ▶ Coordinate your efforts with those of your child's social worker.

Collaboration with the teacher and caseworker may offer the best "team approach" to meet your child's school needs.

- ▶ Set high but realistic expectations for success. Reinforce your child's talents, self-esteem and "can-do" attitude. Give your child ample verbal support and encouragement for trying his or her best at school and for working on homework.
- ▶ Keep school in perspective. Don't let school concerns devour your time at home with your foster child. Home is where you offer your child the most important form of stability: a supportive, nurturing, loving home. While it is important to become and to stay involved in your child's education, you are not a professional tutor.

~ Rick Delaney, Ph.D., author, presenter, trainer and clinician

To learn more about fostering success in school and other issues important to foster, kinship and adoptive parents, please visit us at FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM.

Parents Must Enhance Communication Skills To Advocate for Foster Children in Schools



Foster Parent College has added a 19th course to its online and DVD learning products catalog: "Working With Schools." The course discusses problems foster, adoptive and kinship parents frequently encounter with their school age children. In this multimedia curriculum, foster parents share their experiences dealing with school systems, and gain insight into strategies and methods helpful in developing a positive working relationship with the schools.

Bringing together all involved – parents, teachers, social workers, administrators, counselors and even therapists – "Working with Schools" breaks down critical responsibilities each contributing player has in the role of educating foster children. The parents are usually the primary advocate for the child so effective communication becomes the parent's responsibility.

This course and most other online courses are only \$8 per subject per student. Visit FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM for details.