

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#4

7/05

SOME THINGS CHILDREN NEED FROM YOU

Many children have experienced losing a parent, child abuse, their parents' substance abuse, domestic violence, instability or other traumatic experiences. It may be challenging to manage these children's behavior and help them emotionally. Here are some strategies to help you do just that. Choose those that feel right for you and your child.

Acceptance

The most important and effective strategy is to understand your child's feelings and behavior. Know that to move toward healthy behavior, you need to accept where the child is now. Getting to a healthier place is not about wishing you were already there but about taking small steps. Sometimes, there may be a leap or a set back or a plateau, but if you can accept each point along the way, you will be able to recognize progress.

Organization and Consistency

- Establish clear rules and expectations that remain the same from day to day.
- Set clear, natural and logical consequences
- Regularly reassure children. For example, tell them you will be there for them, that you will protect them, specifically who will pick them up or when they will go somewhere and when they will return.
- Establish regular routines for meals, baths, homework, getting up in the morning and bed times. You may want to write down the schedule and hang it up where the children can see it.
- Prepare children for visits with parents. Make plans for successful visits and have a back up plan for disappointment.
- If someone else will be caring for the child, discuss this plan with the child.

Encouragement for Emotional Expression

- Give the child words for what the child might be feeling. If you see the child expressing excitement by jumping up and down, tell the child, "You seem so excited that you are jumping up and down."
- Listen to the child so that the child learns it is okay to talk about difficult or emotional topics. Use open questions that allow for many kinds of answers, for example, you might ask, "What kinds of things make you angry?"
- Name your own mistakes and talk about them so the child learns that it is okay to talk about mistakes. Let them know that we should expect to make mistakes because they are the way we learn.

Help Build Self Esteem

- Help the child find healthy outlets for energy, for example, sports, art, music, or hobbies
- Praise good behavior, even when it seems small to you. Recognize whenever the child is being helpful.
- Avoid labeling the child as a specific kind of child or just like someone else. Children are still finding out who they are and who they will be.
- Be patient with the child. Change may take a very long time.
- Tell your child about what he does well and tell other people about it, too.

Take Care of Yourself

- Know when to ask for help. All of us have times when we are not sure what to do about something very important to us. It may take time to find the right person to help, but it will be worth the search.
- Be patient with yourself because change may take a long time!
- Recognize those things you do well for your family and talk to the child and others about the importance of these things.

For more information or to discuss this topic, please call Families And Children Together (FACT) at 1-866-298-0896 and ask for a Maine Kids-Kin staff person.

This information is excerpted from the *Ties That Bind* fact sheets printed by
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