

KINSHIP RESOURCE NEWSLETTER 2025 Volume 1

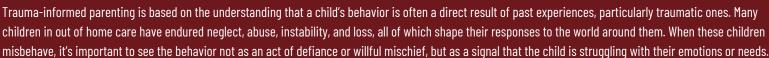
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Dane County Kinship Care 1202 Northport Dr, Madison, WI 53704 **Greetings everyone! Welcome 2025**; I hope you're allowing yourself to enjoy a slower pace that these winter months bring. I fully embrace the Norwegian concept of "Hygge," which aims to create a warm atmosphere. Where you enjoy the good things in life with good people, incorporating slow living into your daily routine and partake in life's quieter pleasures. The dark evenings allow for such a cozy time of connection. In this article, let's talk about how connection making is a key component of trauma informed parenting.

As an out of home caregiver, you are faced with unique challenges on a day-to-day basis. One of the most important and often overlooked aspects of effective discipline is the role of connection. For children in out of home care, who often come from backgrounds of trauma, the way we approach discipline can make all the difference in their healing and growth. By fostering strong connections through trauma-informed parenting, we can create a supportive environment where discipline becomes an opportunity for growth, rather than conflict.

Understanding Trauma-Informed Parenting



A trauma-informed approach shifts our mindset from "How can I stop this behavior?" to "What is this behavior trying to communicate, and how can I help the child feel safe and understood?" When we address the root cause of behavior through connection, we can guide children toward better choices in a way that promotes healing and trust.

Why Connection Matters in Discipline



When a child has experienced trauma, their brain is often in a heightened state of alertness, always scanning for threats or dangers. This can cause them to react in ways that may seem disproportionate to the situation—whether through anger, withdrawal, or other challenging behaviors. In these moments, discipline that focuses on connection rather than punishment can help regulate the child's emotions and help them feel safe. Here are some key ways connection supports effective discipline in a trauma-informed framework:

- 1. <u>Building Trust and Safety</u>: Children who have experienced trauma often have difficulty trusting others, especially adults. They may have learned that adults are not reliable or that their needs won't be met. By prioritizing connection, we can begin to rebuild that trust. When children feel safe, heard, and respected, they are more likely to respond positively to guidance. Establishing a strong bond provides a secure base from which children can learn new behaviors and coping strategies.
- 2. Empathy Over Correction: Instead of focusing on simply correcting a child's behavior, trauma-informed discipline emphasizes empathy and understanding. When children misbehave, it is often because they are overwhelmed by emotions like fear, anxiety, or anger. Rather than immediately jumping into discipline, try to first connect by acknowledging the child's feelings. A response such as, "I can see you're really upset right now. Let's take a moment to calm down," shows that you're attuned to their emotional state and not just their actions. This helps the child feel seen and understood, making them more open to discussing their behavior and learning from the experience.
- 3. <u>Consistency and Predictability</u>: Children in foster care may have experienced instability in their lives, making them wary of changes or unpredictability. By being consistent in your approach to discipline, you provide a sense of stability and safety. Consistency doesn't mean rigidity—it means that children can rely on you to set clear expectations and follow through with those expectations in a calm and predictable manner. When children know what to expect, they feel more in control and less anxious about potential outcomes, which leads to better cooperation.
- 4. <u>Redirection and Teaching, Not Punishment</u>: Discipline in a trauma-informed context isn't about punishment but rather about teaching and guiding. When a child acts out, it's a chance to help them develop new skills and coping mechanisms. Instead of focusing on the negative behavior, redirect the child's energy toward a positive activity or teach them a different way to express their feelings. For example, if a child is throwing a tantrum due to frustration, instead of yelling or punishing, you might offer them tools to express their emotions—like deep breathing exercises or drawing to calm down.
- 5. <u>Avoiding Power Struggles</u>: Traumatized children often have a heightened sensitivity to authority figures and may feel powerless due to their past experiences. When discipline feels like a power struggle, it can trigger a child's past trauma, making them more resistant and less likely to respond. Connection helps to defuse these power struggles. By approaching the child with respect and understanding, you are less likely to trigger defensiveness and can instead create a collaborative environment where the child feels empowered and understood.
- 6. <u>Creating a Healing Environment:</u> When we focus on connection over discipline, we are fostering a healing environment. For children in foster care, this environment is critical to their emotional and psychological well-being. Healing can only occur when children feel safe enough to express themselves and trust that their caregivers have their best interests at heart. Through trauma-informed discipline, you provide a secure space for the child to work through their challenges, knowing they are not alone and that they are supported every step of the way.

The Long-Term Benefits of Connection in Discipline

loved, respected, and ready to thrive.



By emphasizing connection over traditional discipline, you are not just addressing the behavior in the moment. You are helping to rewrite the child's narrative showing them that their feelings are valid, that they can trust adults, and that their worth is not defined by their mistakes. As the child begins to internalize these messages, they will be more likely to develop the self-regulation skills and emotional resilience that will serve them throughout their lives.

This shift in approach takes time and patience, but the rewards are immense. A connected, trauma-informed approach to discipline not only helps children heal, but it also strengthens the relationship you share with them. As parents, your role is not just to provide a home, but to create an environment where the child feels



<u>POWERFUL VIDEO</u> from a Relative Provider

Some common themes relative caregivers handle, when caring for their adult children AND their grandchildren. Experiences feel like a roller coaster of emotions, grief, shame, social perceptions of them as parents, eventually being in a position to need to talk to your grandchildren about how their parents lived and died. Offering hope, managing secondary trauma & coping skills.



Jean O'Brien -- Presentation at Families Like Mine Conference

Wisconsin Wayfinder Children's Resource Network

Wisconsin Wayfinder -- Children's Resource Network

A service connecting families of children with delays, disabilities, special health care needs, or mental health conditions to the resources and support they need to thrive. Since its launch in November 2023, Wisconsin Wayfinder has supported the families of more than 2,200 children and nearly 670 providers and professionals across the state, helping them navigate complex health care and access crucial services.

Wisconsin Wayfinder - Children's Resource Network



LOVEJOU

Child & Youth Treatment and Therapy Options

Mental Health Crisis Services:

Journey Mental Health Center provides mental health crisis services for Dane County children and youth as well as adults. Dane County's 24 Hour Crisis/Suicide Prevention Hotline is 608-280-2600. More information about Journey Crisis Services can be found at https://journeymhc.org/emergency-services/#suicide-preventionhotline

<u>Drop-In Therapy:</u> https://anesistherapycenter.com/drop-inclinics

School Based Health Centers (SBHC):

Provides comprehensive medical and behavioral health care directly in MMSD high schools: https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/mental-healthwellbeing/resources/article/~board/mental-health-and-well-being-

resources/post/school-based-health-centers-sbhc

Mental Health Care Coordination Services

- The Building Bridges program provides short-term wraparound style case management and service coordination for 4K-8 students who are experiencing mental health challenges within their school setting and require additional supports. Services are voluntary and involve both parents and the identified student. Student Services staff at each school district identify and refer students to Building Bridges. Participating school districts include, DeForest, Madison, Middleton-Cross Plains, Monona Grove, Mount Horeb, Oregon, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona and Waunakee. Please contact your participating school district for more information about the Building Bridges Program.
- Comprehensive Community Services (CCS). The CCS program offers a wide array of psychosocial rehabilitation services. These are services and supportive activities that assist CCS clients with mental health and/or substance use conditions to achieve their highest possible level of independent functioning, stability, and independence, and to facilitate recovery.

Parent Peer Support and Advocacy

Wisconsin Family Ties (WFT) provides parent peer support, system navigation and advocacy for parents of children with mental health concerns. Wisconsin Family Times Parent Peer Specialist bring both system knowledge and lived experience to aid parents as they seek the best solutions for their children experiencing mental health challenges. More information can be found at https://www.wifamilyties.org/

Outpatient Therapy and Psychiatry Services

Dane County Children and Youth who are uninsured can access outpatient mental health and substance use treatment at Journey Mental Health Center by contacting 608-280-2720. More information about Journey Mental Health Center Outpatient services can be found at https://journeymhc.org/clinic-based-services/



Strategies for Building Connection over Discipline

"Building connection over discipline" means prioritizing the establishment of a positive relationship with someone, especially a child, before resorting to disciplinary measures, focusing on understanding their feelings and needs rather than solely enforcing rules; essentially, aiming to guide behavior through a strong connection rather than punishment alone.

Key points about building connection over discipline:

Empathy and active listening:

• Really listen to the other person's perspective and try to understand their emotions before responding with discipline.

Positive reinforcement:

• Highlight and praise good behavior more than focusing on negative actions.

Open communication:

• Create a safe space for open dialogue where concerns can be expressed without fear of punishment.

Addressing underlying issues:

• Look for the reasons behind undesirable behavior and address those needs instead of just reacting to the action.

Collaborative problem-solving:

• Involve the person in finding solutions to issues instead of dictating consequences.

Benefits of building connection over discipline:

- Improved behavior: Children who feel understood and connected are more likely to cooperate and self-regulate.
- Stronger relationships: Fosters a more positive and trusting bond between individuals.
- Enhanced self-esteem: Children who feel valued and supported are more likely to have a healthy self-image.





Maintaining Sibling & Birth Family Connections

Sibling connections and connections with birth families are important for a child's emotional health and well-being. They can help children feel a sense of identity, stability, and belonging.

Sibling connections

- 1. Provide continuity: Siblings can provide a sense of stability and continuity when children are separated from their birth families.
- 2. Can be a source of comfort: Siblings can be a source of comfort and a link to a child's biological heritage.
- 3. Can be important for emotional health: The bond between siblings can be especially important for children who have been separated from other birth family members.

Birth family connections

- 1. Can help with identity
- 2. Children who maintain connections with their birth families can have a better sense of identity.
- 3. Can help with emotional development
- 4. Children who maintain connections with their birth families are more likely to experience positive emotional and behavioral development.
- 5. Can help with mental health
- 6. Children who maintain connections with their birth families are at a lower risk of developing mental health issues.

How to maintain connections

- **1**. Make an effort to have some kind of positive connection with your child's birth family.
- 2. Be creative! Use creative ways to nurture the connection, such as video chats, sharing pictures, or creating a picture book.
- 3. Be patient and consistent in your efforts to support your child's need for sibling connections.
- 4. Seek help. If issues progress to a more concerning degree, work with caseworkers and adoption-competent family counselors.







4 Self-Care Ideas and Tips for Providers

Caring for yourself is the first step to caring for others. Self-care should be a top priority for foster parents and adoptive parents. Taking care of children, especially children in the foster care system, can be stressful. To give the best quality of life for the child you have chosen to bring into your life, you must have a plan to care for yourself.

<u>4 Reasons to practice self-care:</u>

- It provides balance. Our daily lives are filled with stressors. Some stressors can be positive (adding a foster child to the family, starting a new job, getting a new pet) or negative (being stuck in traffic, child forgetting to do their chores, arguing with spouse/partner). It's essential to balance our negative emotions with positive emotions. Implementing self-care activities provides the time and space to feel those positive emotions that improve the day.
- 2. It provides the potential to learn more about yourself. Maybe you don't like yoga, or maybe you enjoy checking your work email on the weekends. Practicing and implementing different types of self-care will teach you more about yourself. In practicing self-care, you may also figure out things that trigger you and how you respond to the trigger (maybe you yell at your spouse/partner when they leave a wet towel on the floor, or you get angry when your child interrupts you while you pray). Recognizing triggers and acting accordingly models excellent personal development for your family members.
- 3. It allows you to care for others. When you're in an airplane, they tell you to put the oxygen mask on yourself before you put it on your child. You've heard the saying, "you can't pour from an empty cup." The mindset is all the same, you can't help others if you aren't at your best. Implementing self-care will ensure that you are operating at your highest capabilities.
- 4. It improves mood and decreases anxiety. Some days are just going to be more challenging than others. Whether you have a diagnosed mental health condition or you're just having a bad day, self-care can help how you're feeling. Being intentional with your forms of self-care gives you a routine of positive emotions to look forward to.





Blocked Care

<u>Blocked Care</u> is a condition that can occur when adoptive parents have difficulty connecting with their child. It can be caused by compassion fatigue, which can lead to feelings of resentment, anger, and isolation.

Symptoms of blocked care

- Feeling defensive and irritable
- Feeling overwhelmed and fatigued
- Resenting the child or the situation
- Feeling cynical about helpful ideas
- Feeling like they have lost compassion
- Isolating themselves
- Regretting kinship care or fostering

Am I in blocked care?

- Feeling defensive and finding yourself being more guarded to protect yourself from rejection.
- Feeling burned out, chronically overwhelmed or fatigued.
- Being aware that you're meeting your child's practical needs but that it's hard to feel any real pleasure in parenting.

Causes of blocked care

- Compassion fatigue, which can make it hard to connect with the child
- Indifference or hostility from the child
- Suppressing caring feelings

How to overcome blocked care

- Prioritize self-care, such as getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising
- Seek support from a therapist, social worker, or counselor
- Read books or attend workshops about blocked care

Blocked care is not a character flaw, but a treatable condition. It's important to remember that both the child and the parent are affected by blocked care.

Blocked Care: How to Regain Compassion for Yourself and Your Child.

- Please know ... There is hope
- You need to nurture yourself by caring for your internal world, your external world, and your relational world.

Resources:

- https://thearchibaldproject.com/blocked-care-how-to-regain-compassion-for-yourself-and-your-child/
- https://adoptionwise.org/signs-of-blocked-care/



YOUR KINSHIP TEAM

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NOTE

If you are not getting our Kinship-only emails, and would like to, please reach out to Dawn Douglas to get added to our email list.



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