

SAFE



Fairfax County Department of
Family Services



FAIRFAX COUNTY
Foster Care & Adoption

Special Needs Adoption Family Exchange, Presented by Post Adoption Services,
Fairfax County Department of Family Services

Volume 18

Spring 2011

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs

Reminders

Please don't forget to submit your Annual Affidavit. The Affidavit is required to keep the Adoption Assistance agreement in effect.

Requests for services must be made in writing to the agency and approval must be given prior to the beginning of services.

Please note the agency is NOT responsible for payment of bills or receipts submitted later than six months after the end of the month in which the services were rendered.

If you would like to receive our newsletter or other information regarding adoption subsidy via email please submit your email to sharon.beazer@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Complex trauma in children and adolescents

Many children involved in the child welfare system have experienced trauma. The traumatic stress field has adopted the term "complex trauma" to describe the experience of multiple, chronic and prolonged traumatic events such as physical abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, or exposure to domestic or community violence.

Research has shown that prolonged traumatic childhood experiences have a profound impact on many areas of functioning. The impact of

trauma has been shown to interfere with optimal brain development. The symptoms of complex trauma can include depression, various medical illnesses, a variety of impulsive and self-destructive behaviors, problems with information processing, and can cause an inability to form secure attachments. Approaching each of these problems separately, rather than as an expression of a system of internal disorganization runs the risk of children being diagnosed with a variety of conditions as if they occurred independently and were unrelated to their childhood trauma.

From infancy through the teenage years, the most important factor for successful brain development is conveyed by the social environment. A baby's brain development is very much dependent on its interaction with its primary caregivers. By responding appropriately to their infants' needs, caregivers help a child develop ways to both express emotions and to respond to situations appropriately.

When a caregiver, does not regularly provide, or is unable to provide, an appropriate response to their children's distress, their children are unlikely to develop a sense that the external environment is able to provide relief. They have trouble relying on others to help them and will be unable to regulate their emotional states by themselves. As a result they experience

excessive anxiety, anger and a longing to have their needs met.

When children are unable to achieve a sense of control and stability, they become helpless. If they are unable to grasp what is going on and unable to change it, they go immediately from fearful to a fight and flight response without being able to learn from their experiences. Brain images of children who have endured prolonged abuse show a deficit in the amygdala, the part of the brain that controls emotion. Subsequently when exposed to reminders of a trauma (e.g., sensations, physiological states, images, sounds, smells or situations), they tend to behave as if they were traumatized all over again. Many problems of traumatized children can be understood as efforts to minimize objective threat and to regulate their emotional stress. Such children have never been able to learn an appropriate response to stress and consequently are often labeled as “oppositional”, rebellious or anti-social.

Recommended treatment requires a phase based approach. The core treatment component involves the following sequential approaches (i) the creation of a safe environment for the child; (ii) teaching the child to self-regulate; (iii) helping the child reflect on past and present experiences; (iv) helping the child resolve past experiences using specialized therapy; (v) teaching the child to form appropriate attachments; and (vi) enhancing the child’s self-esteem. (This article has been adapted from Cook, A. et al, Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents, Winter 2007, *Focal Point*, Vol. 21 and Bessal A. van der Kolk, Developmental Trauma Disorder, *Psychiatric Annals 00:0, 200X*). More information on this topic can be found at The National Child Traumatic Stress Network at <http://www.nctsn.org>.

Support Groups

Adoption Family Support Groups

Alexandria Support Group

Patty Pearson, Facilitator

Tel: (703) 780-8252 or Email:

PattyLPerson@yahoo.com

Fredericksburg Support Group

Patti Huber, Facilitator

Tel: (540)582-8930 or Email:

Phuber4kdz@yahoo.com

Loudoun Support Group (daytime group)

Ashburn, VA

Lisa Mathey, Facilitator

Tel: (703) 347-5049 or Email:

Mathey88@yahoo.com

Webinar Workshops

The Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE) offers web workshops on various topics related to adoption. The webinars can be accessed at:

<http://www.adoptionsupport.org/cal/index.php>

Mary L. Adamchak

703-324-7660 (TTY 703-222-8452)

mary.adamchak@fairfaxcounty.gov

Julie Bowman

703-324-7131 (TTY 703-222-8452)

julie.bowman@fairfaxcounty.gov

Sharon Beazer, Administrative Assistant

703-324-7783 (TTY 703-222-8452)

sharon.beazer@fairfaxcounty.gov