



**CORE**  
**TEEN**

Critical On-going Resource Family Education

# Right Time Training: Parental Adaptation

CORE TEEN CURRICULUM

# In Acknowledgement

On behalf of the CORE Teen Partners, we would like to acknowledge and thank the many content experts, families, foster youth alumni and professionals who provided guidance on what content to include, the sites (Florida, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Tribe in North Carolina) who piloted this curriculum and provided candid feedback on how it could be edited, and the multitudes of families and foster youth alumni who participated in the piloting of the curriculum; providing critical feedback on how it could be improved.

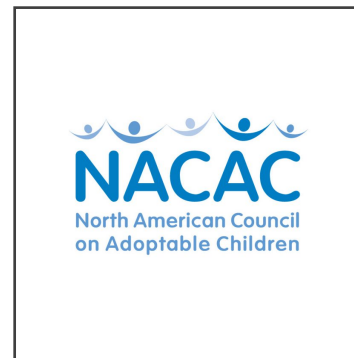


This project was funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. The contents of this material are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau.

# CORE TEEN CURRICULUM: RIGHT TIME TRAINING

The CORE Teen Curriculum is comprised of three components: 1) Self-Assessment; 2) Classroom Training, and 3) Right Time Training. It was developed through a 3 year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. Project partners included Spaulding for Children; the ChildTrauma Academy; The Center for Adoption Support and Education; the North American Council on Adoptable Children; and the University of Washington.

The intent of the project was to develop a state-of-the-art training program to equip resource parents to meet the needs of older youth who have moderate to serious emotional and behavior health challenges who require intensive and coordinated services and may be at risk for more restrictive congregative care.





## PARENTAL ADAPTATION OVERVIEW

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Often times success doesn't come from strength, but from flexibility and adaptability.

~Debasish Mridha

”

The purpose of this learning opportunity is to enhance your knowledge around Parental Adaptation. Parental Adaptation is based on the idea that youth cannot be parented in the same manner as “traditional” parenting. It targets the thinking and skills parents will need to adjust to assure that their parenting responses successfully respond to the needs of the youth. The learning objectives are to:

- ▶ Understand why parenting responses need to be adjusted based on the youth's skills, emotion development and needs
- ▶ Increase awareness of how a youth's prior experiences have shaped their sense of identity, values and/or behavior, and how the lack of alignment between their values and yours can create discomfort for you
- ▶ Identify new support and intervention strategies

Flexible expectations and the willingness and ability to match your parenting responses to the needs of the youth is critical. Every youth is unique and will require an adapted parenting style to heal. Families who are able to adapt stand a far greater chance of success in building a positive relationship with their youth. Resource parents must be able to look at what is the root cause of the challenging behavior and adjust their parenting response to address the need. Youth who feel understood, validated, and consistently have their needs met are then capable of having relationships that will positively influence their interactions, responses and behaviors with others.

Youth with challenging and difficult behaviors often lack some essential skills in the areas of self-regulation, tolerance for frustration and problem solving. Being an adaptable parent will require you to effectively identify what skills a child is lacking and support the youth in acquiring these skills through a collaborative process in doses that the youth can handle developmentally. Having an adaptable parenting style will help you respond to each youth and situation more successfully by applying the targeted response when most needed.

## PRE-VIDEO DISCUSSION

“

The goal is to see the precious child that exists beneath the survival strategies, and to let them know we see them.

”

~Dr. Karyn Purvis

Parental adaptation starts with preparing yourself for how your life will change. If you are parenting with a partner, you are going to differ on how to approach different parenting situations. Partners/parents' ability—or inability—to reach an agreement can mean the difference between positive results or anxiety-provoking situations for youth.

- ▶ How you will cope with the responsibilities and challenges of being a resource parent?
- ▶ How will you resolve issues when you and your parenting partner do not agree?

Your parenting style should change over time – as you first get to know the youth, as you better understand the needs of the youth, and as the youth develops.

- ▶ As you adjust your parenting style, how will you prepare yourself to feel a little unsure about what you're doing?
- ▶ Can you reach out to trusted resources and friends as you find the parenting style that's best for the youth?

No matter what parenting style you choose, successful ones will contain the key elements, including: flexible expectations, individualized responses, patience and kindness, and time and attention.

- ▶ What expectations do you have for this youth? Are they based on the needs of the youth and the experiences they have had?
- ▶ What expectations do you have for yourself? How flexible can you be and what will be the situations that will be the most challenging?

Think of other questions you may have and write them on a piece of paper. Reflect on them while reviewing the video.



VIEW the Parental Adaptation Right Time Episode

## POST VIDEO DISCUSSION

Talk with your viewing partner or support system about your reactions to the video. Was there anything that you heard that surprised you? What questions remain for you?

In this video segment, you heard experts and parents talk about the importance of flexibility and the need to model and practice this skill. Families and professionals shared their experiences and advice around recognizing and letting go of their expectations and accepting the things that cannot be controlled. This segment also provided information on the critical role of tailored parenting responses and how these responses can shape and influence your child's behavior (when parents adapt and change, youth can change and grow). Parents also described how identity challenges, for example, can create a clash of values within a family system. They shared ways that they changed their perspective without changing their values.

In the episode, you heard that "inflexibility + inflexibility = meltdown". You also heard that trauma is unpredictable, and our kids are unpredictable. You may not have thought that as a parent you would need to follow the child's lead.

- ▶ Do you think it is true to say that a parent needs to have more flexibility than a child? Why or why not?
- ▶ When you think about how many of your youth have moved from place to place, why might it be unreasonable to expect youth to adapt to our rules?

Please discuss with your viewing partner (parenting partner, family member, caseworker, etc.) what information was presented to you that was new, or that resonated with you regarding the reasons why individualized parenting is such a critical concept for youth in care. Did you have any "aha" moments about your child during the viewing of this video? If so, what were they?

“

Inflexibility + Inflexibility =  
Meltdown

”

~Dr. Stuart Ablon

# PARENTAL ADAPTATION SKILLS

A variety of skills were introduced within this video segment related to adaptive parenting. Discuss what you recall about each of these skills with your viewing partner. Make note of any skills that you do not recall, or do not feel as though you understand fully. Use some of the resources provided to learn more.

- ▶ **Developing Flexible Expectations** – You will likely begin the parenting relationship with a set of expectations about the way your child should behave. It can be challenging when your expectations clash with the reality of your child. You will need to make changes in your parenting approaches based on the needs of the child and not expect that the child will simply adapt to your family.
- ▶ **Parenting to the Need** – It is important that you accept that you will be uncomfortable for a while, until you figure out what your child’s specific needs are. Over time, you will become more aware, understand, and be sensitive to the specific responses of your youth, despite the manner of intensity with which the youth communicates their needs. It is important that you are strategic as you work to identify the youth’s needs, observing what works and following their lead.
- ▶ **Understanding Development** – Paying attention to your child’s skills in developmental terms is important. For example, when you understand the delays in your child’s ability to tolerate frustration and solve problems, you can adapt your expectations and make changes in the way you respond to them. Many youth missed key steps in their development and may need to go backward before they can move forward.
- ▶ **Balancing Predictability, Consistency and Flexibility** – You will experience your child’s behavior as unpredictable and inconsistent. Because it will not be helpful to meet inflexibility with inflexibility, you will need to provide predictability and consistency and find opportunities to compromise and say yes as often as possible.
- ▶ **Choosing Battles Wisely** – Be sure to pick your battles wisely, looking at the big picture and asking yourself what the most important problem to solve is right now. Focusing on one thing at a time will help you feel less overwhelmed and allow you to be strategic as you approach every day challenges.
- ▶ **Knowing Your Buttons** – We each have sensitivities to certain behaviors that when occur, invoke an immediate heightened response. For example, when youth express themselves through lying, stealing, or swearing, your triggers may be activated. You need to stay regulated so that you can avoid engaging in a conflictive interaction with the youth. Knowing what triggers your buttons is a proactive step to help you maintain a calm and predictable response.
- ▶ **Accepting and Letting Go** – It is not your job to fix to “fix” your child, it is their journey. You can encourage and empower your child in a coaching role to make good decisions using your support. Sometimes that means suspending judgment, accepting your child’s blueprint and simply hearing what your child has to say. Providing space as your youth shares their experiences is key to strengthening the relationship.

“  
Wherever you are, be all there.  
”

-Jim Elliot

Once you have reviewed the components, which ones do you believe require the biggest stretch from your natural parenting style?

Because these components will be a stretch from your natural style, they will certainly create feelings of discomfort. Being able to tolerate discomfort and learn to master a new skill will be crucial to your success in learning to adapt as a parent. Please take a moment with your viewing partner to discuss how you anticipate feeling when you try to use this new skill.



## THE ADAPTABLE PARENT

In developing ways to be more flexible and adaptable, review the list of the qualities of an adaptive parent and identify a few you can begin to work on.

1. Doesn't ask: "What is wrong with the youth?", instead asks: "What happened to the youth and how does this relate to their current behaviors?"
2. Doesn't see youth's survival behavior as hurtful, purposeful, calculating, or deliberate. Does not give in to a simplistic interpretation that it is the youth's choice to act in these ways.
3. Has a philosophy that "youth do well if they can", not "teens do well if they want to". No teen wants to fail, and trauma and its impact on the youth makes succeeding more difficult.
4. Tries to understand and identify what skills a youth is lacking and teaches these skills through a collaborative process in increments the youth can handle.
5. Develops strategies to "not sweat the small stuff" or ignore the minor stuff, while also recognizing and celebrating the little things.
6. Sees puzzling behaviors as problems yet to be solved.
7. Understands that we are all imperfect parents, is aware of their own deficits and triggers, and can forgive youth (and themselves) as they strive to do better.
8. Can live in the present, learn from the past and works to anticipate and predict the future.
9. Does not believe that the parent's only job is to set high expectations and stay firm in them, nor is it the youth's job to meet the parent's expectations.
10. Understands that every child and youth exposed to trauma responds, reacts, and heals in their own unique way – and knows that parents must learn to parent to their youth's needs.
11. Knows that trauma impacts are expressed at the developmental stage when the trauma occurred, and that youth can be stuck at or need to return to earlier developmental stages.
12. Does not expect the youth to "act their age" and is comfortable parenting to the child's emotional age.
13. Recognizes that healing occurs in relationship and relationship development is best supported and improved as the parent meets the youth's needs.



## QUESTIONS PARENTS CAN ASK THEMSELVES

Teens present parents with developing sexuality, peer group challenges, potential exploration of drugs and alcohol, and other potentially high-risk behaviors. Many parents report that these challenges cause significant worry for them, or that the issues feel highly provocative or intense. Below are situations you may want to think about and consider how you would handle them:



1. My youth is always comparing our home to others and is telling me that he used to be able to do a lot of things I won't let him and that makes me feel uncomfortable.
2. He is so quiet. He doesn't share anything that is going on.
3. I am not sure I really understand what she is going through. I have changed my parenting style, but I feel unsure about what I am doing and if it's helping.
4. My child identifies with music, people, and activities that I do not approve of.
5. He thinks smoking marijuana is just fine, does not think school is important, and thinks violence makes him strong.
6. My daughter is obsessed with boys. She is making really poor decisions about her social media use and the way she dresses.
7. We are a Christian family and our son says he does not believe in God, and we are not telling him he has to. Does he need to go to church with us and be respectful while he is there?
8. I know that my son needs for me to respond to his need for attention to his cues, but my friends and family find this to be highly immature and tell me that he is controlling. They are starting to create doubts in me if I am doing the right thing.

Reflect on something that is currently a challenge between you and your youth where your parenting responses thus far have produced results you are not satisfied with. Use the space below to describe the behavior, your parenting efforts thus far, and how your youth responded.

Write down the behavior that is currently causing you a challenge, your parenting response, and your youth's response.

## RESOURCES

These resources can provide some additional information that may help you explore Parental Regulation further.

 **Mind-to-Mind: The Importance of Mind Reading**

Dr. Richard Delaney describes how typically humans learn to be social in their earliest relationships within their families, and describes strategies that parents can use to become effective mind readers and thereby be less likely to be overwhelmed by emotion or to resort to behavior rather than words to describe needs and feelings.

<https://nacac.org/resource/mind-to-mind/>

 **Retrace Developmental Stages to Help Older Children Heal**

Social worker Claudia Fletcher describes how parenting older adopted children requires patience, time, and realistic expectations and uses Erikson's developmental stages to better prepare parents as they plan to adopt and work through the first few years of placement.

<https://nacac.org/resource/retrace-developmental-stages-help-older-children-heal/>

 **Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them**

Although written with a lens on supporting children in the school setting, Dr. Ross W. Greene does a beautiful job of describing the difference between "can't" and "won't", and offers excellent strategies for parents and educators alike to help children build skills they are lacking, such as frustration tolerance and problem solving.

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B001FA0IN8/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\\_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B001FA0IN8/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1)

# CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

Now, it is time to develop a plan to address those areas you would like to change. Consider the points / questions below, as well as your self-assessment and classroom material, when identifying a plan to improve your skills related to parental regulation.

- ❖ Identify / define the specific issue or concern you have related to parental adaptation.
  - ▶ If you completed the CORE Teen Self-Assessments, consider your results related to the characteristics that are essential to support parental adaptation (compassion, commitment, acceptance, attunement, self-awareness, self-regulation and adaptability/flexibility).
  - ▶ Review the material that was presented in classroom Session 3: Developing and Sustaining a Healthy and Supportive Relationship with Your Youth.
  
- ❖ Consider what expectations you have of the youth – whether spoken or unspoken.
  - ▶ What behaviors or responses from the youth do you anticipate?
  - ▶ What are your triggers? What behaviors or actions of the youth appear to violate your beliefs, values and dreams?
  - ▶ What expectations appear to trigger the youth's reactions?
  - ▶ How does this relate to your level of comfort, confidence and ability?
  
- ❖ Reflect on your thoughts about adapting your parenting approach.
  - ▶ What will you, as the caregiver have to change?
  - ▶ What barriers do you believe exist in creating a parenting atmosphere that is both strategic and adaptable?
  - ▶ What strengths will you leverage, and what additional help will you need?

What three things am I going to do to improve my adaptability as a parent?

Action Step-what am I going to do differently?	When I will try it	What resources will help me	How will I know if it worked	Who will give me feedback
1.				
2.				
3.				