

Peer Support

Resource Parents

Purpose

Children in Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) receive daily care, guidance, and modeling from specialized, highly trained, and skilled foster parents. TFC families receive support and supervision from private foster care agencies with the purpose of stabilizing a child's mental/behavioral health issues, facilitating children's timely and successful transition into permanent placements (e.g., reunification, adoption, or independent living), and achieving individualized goals and outcomes based upon a comprehensive, multifocal care plan.

Caring for children with severe mental health and behavioral challenges can be rewarding, but it does not come without challenges. Caregivers need to be able to work in large teams, communicating often and effectively. It is necessary to train and support the family of origin beyond what would be expected in a traditional foster family situation. The trauma the child has experienced can result in secondary trauma to the caregiver and the team around the child. The day-to-day work of caring for the child can wear down the most dedicated and prepared caregiver.

Peer support, where TFC Resource Parents can learn from each other and help each other is a component of any therapeutic foster care program. Therefore, Iowa's TFC will utilize the following strategies:

The TFC caregiver should:

- Establish relationships with other TFC Resource Parent(s) and become part of a therapeutic community, by utilizing clinical resources, attending TFC parent(s) support groups, and providing/utilizing respite as needed.
- Be aware of stress levels of all individuals in the home, including the child's. Be willing to communicate personal and professional challenges with peer supports that may affect the care of the child(ren) in the home.
- Provide feedback and support to other TFC Resource Parent(s), such as during support groups or training.
- Be accepting of feedback or observations from peer supports and be willing to provide the same. There may be times when even the most prepared professionals need help.

Resources

- Respite care may be accessed by contacting RRTS.
- At least quarterly TFC Resource Parent support group is accessed through RRTS. Among the benefits of a therapeutic community are:
 - Better understanding of roles and responsibilities
 - Problem solving around system issues
 - Sharing ideas about behavioral strategies
 - Meet potential respite caregivers
 - Learning new coping strategies and sharing what works
 - Fun with new friends
- Leadership opportunities such as coaching other TFC Resource Parent(s)