

# **Wounded Children, Healing Homes:** Understanding the Impact of Parenting Traumatized Children on Foster and Adoptive Parents



**Presenter:**

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# Recognizing and Understanding your Expectations



Using the scale below, respond to the following statements by circling the number that you feel applies to you.

**1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True**

**1. My ability to love this child will be enough.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

**2. I will feel love and connection to this child immediately.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

**3. This child will become a part of my family and learn how to function within our/my 'rules,' goals and ambitions.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

**4. This child's needs will be just like those of the other children in my family.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True                      5. N/A

**5. Our child will fit well into our extended family and be welcomed by them.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True                      5. N/A

**6. My family/friends will respect my role as a parent and support me through the journey of fostering or adopting.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

**7. My child will see us as his/her family and forget their birth family and the past.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

**8. I can do for this child what was not done for me. (I have a history of neglect as a child)**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True                      5. N/A

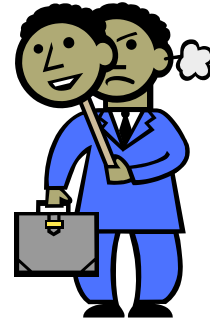
**9. I will not do to this child what was done to me. ( I have a history of abuse as a child)**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True                      5. N/A

**10. I will never feel any regrets or resentment about adopting or fostering a child with a traumatic past.**

1: Not true                      2: Rarely true                      3: Often true                      4: True

# Vicarious Trauma – Who is at risk?



1. Anyone who, by nature is **empathetic** is at risk for vicarious traumatization.
2. Any adoptive parent **who does not allow himself/herself sufficient recovery time** is at risk for vicarious traumatization.
3. Any adoptive parent **who has experienced his/her own personal trauma** and has not had the opportunity for his or her own personal healing is at risk for vicarious traumatization.
4. Any adoptive parent who finds himself/herself **isolated** from family, friends, and professional supports is at risk for vicarious traumatization.
5. Any adoptive parent who **struggles due to a lack of systemic resources** or who has an **inability to ask for help** is a risk for vicarious traumatization
6. Any adoptive parent who has come to belief that he/she **has failed “the mission.”**

## What Effects Have You Experienced as a Foster or Adoptive Parent?

On a scale of 1-5, what effect do the following have on you? (1 = little effect, 5 = extreme effect) Circle your top five negative effects.

### EFFECTS - Negative

### Rating Your Effect

1. Lack of understanding by family	
2. Lack of understanding by friends	
3. Lack of validation as a parent	
4. Lack of support by family and/or friends	
5. Lack of support by agency/social workers	
6. Living with uncertainty every day (child's behavior)	
7. Feel like living with a time bomb/walking on egg shells	
8. Negative changes within myself	
9. Negative changes in my family/ Splitting of family members	
10. Negative changes in relationships with extended family	
11. Negative changes in relationships with friends	
12. Feeling isolated	
13. Choosing to withdraw from friends and family	
14. Extreme physical exhaustion	
15. Drained social and emotional energy	
16. Extreme mood swings	
17. Loss of feelings of competency as a parent	
18. No time to take of own personal needs	
19. Physical symptoms: gain weight, lost weight, sleep problems	
20. Profound sadness	
21. Regret for what might have been with this child	
22. Feeling like a social pariah	

**EFFECTS - POSITIVE****Rating Your Effect**

I am feeling more competent as a parent	
I feel like I am gaining insight and understanding into this child.	
I feel like I am gaining insight into myself.	
I feel I am adapting to these unusual circumstances.	
I feel good about the direction we are going.	
I feel I have an ability to celebrate small successes.	
I have a growing determination to make it against all odds.	

This was, in part, adapted from “Loving and Living with Traumatized Children,” by Megan Hirst.

# Principles of Success for Parenting Children Who Come from Hard Places



1. Understand that the child's behavior isn't about you. Monitor your responses and ask yourself- am I taking this personally? If the answer is yes, your next question is, "what are you going to do to change your emotional responses to the child in your home?"
2. Pay attention to the messages you say to yourself. "I am a horrible parent." "I am a failure." "If anybody knew how I have failed, they would be horrified.", etc, etc., etc.
3. Return to your initial motivation for adopting. Stop and take note of the improvements your child has made. Revise your unrealistic expectations for your child and for yourself.
4. Continue to learn and study regarding the importance of key elements of healing for traumatized children: understanding the impact of trauma, maximizing a child's sense of felt safety, building healing connections and learning to connect before correction.
5. Be aware that this CAN happen to YOU. Know what signs to look for. Remember the frog in the kettle/ Be attuned to the reality it **IS** happening and recognize it for what it is. Don't ignore the boiling pot.

6. Regularly examine and explore what is happening to each family member – especially mom.
7. Do a role check. Is one parent carrying the load?
8. Take good care of yourself physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually –(but you already know all of that 😊)
9. Talk about it with people who understand – don't run from connections.
10. Find balance in your life. (There is no glory in martyrdom)





## Identifying Your Circle of Support

*Created by Heather Bench, an adoptive mom  
Dayton, Ohio*

**This exercise allows you to identify a person or multiple people who represent the traits of a support person in your life. Anyone who represents the following traits, list their name in the provided box on the next page.**

**The Rock -** A person(s) who will remain in your life during the difficult times and continue to love you unconditionally.

**The Wise -** A person(s) who will always tell the truth even when it is not what you want to hear.

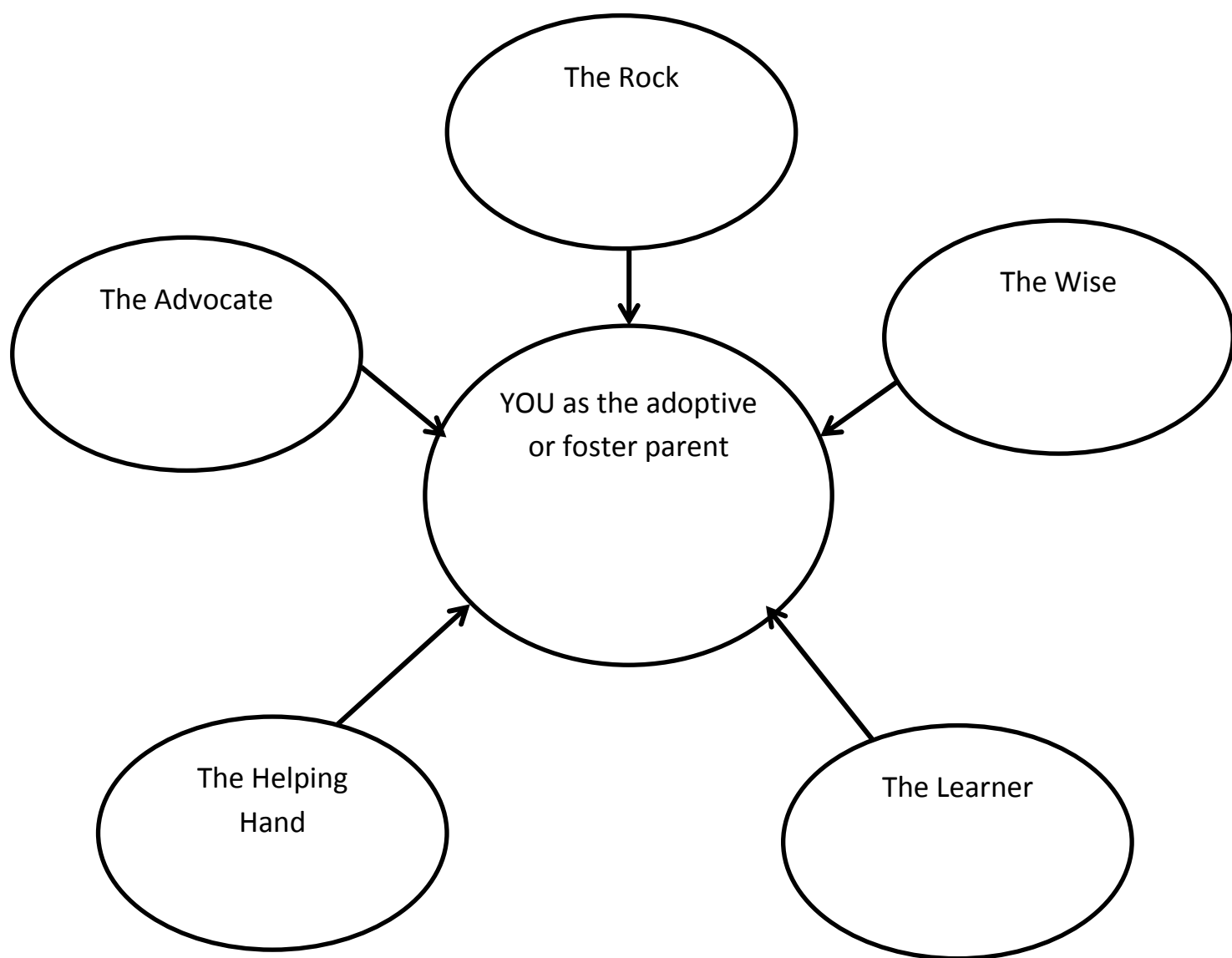
**The Learner –** A person(s) who will learn alongside of you.

**The Helping Hand -** A person(s) who understands and is aware when you may need a break and steps in to assist.

**Advocate -** A person(s) who will always stand up for you and continue to support you.



# Identifying Your Circle of Support



# ***Recognizing the Early Signs of Parenting Stress***

Paying attention to how we are responding to the added stress of parenting a traumatized child is absolutely key to remaining healthy. To ignore symptoms of stress is to invite many physical and emotional health problems.

Check the ones that apply to you. Have you noticed any increase in the following areas:

## **<sup>1</sup>Physical symptoms:**

	Headaches
	Body tensions, muscle aches
	Stomach problems
	Sleep problems
	Rapid heartbeat
	Weight gain or loss
	Dizziness
	Nausea

## **Behavioral Symptoms:**

	Increased smoking
	Increased drinking or drug use
	Procrastination
	Grinding teeth

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Orlans and Teri Levy, 2007, *Healing Parent: Helping Wounded Children to Trust and Heal*, (Washington, DC: CWLA), page 109

	Overly critical
	Fidgeting
	Isolating self from others

**Emotional Symptoms:**

	Severe anxiety
	Crying
	Irritability
	Quick temper
	Sense of loneliness
	Lack of meaning
	Depression

**Cognitive Symptoms**

	Fearful and anxious thoughts
	Poor concentration
	Forgetfulness
	Loss of sense of humor
	Loss of creativity
	Indecisiveness

**It you have checked a number of these; it is time to make changes. We are going to look now at the self-care assessment. You will use this to identify areas in which you can better take care of yourself.**

## Self Care Assessment



The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:

5 = I do this frequently

4 = I do this occasionally

3 = I barely or rarely do this

2 = I never do this

1= This never occurred to me

### Physical Self-Care

\_\_\_ Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)

\_\_\_ Eat healthily

\_\_\_ Exercise

\_\_\_ Get regular medical care for prevention

\_\_\_ Get medical care when needed

\_\_\_ Take time off when sick

- \_\_\_ Get massages
- \_\_\_ Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
- \_\_\_ Get enough sleep
- \_\_\_ Wear clothes I like
- \_\_\_ Take vacations
- \_\_\_ Take day trips or mini-vacations
- \_\_\_ Make time away from telephones
- \_\_\_ Other:

### **Psychological Self-Care**

- \_\_\_ Make time for self-reflection
- \_\_\_ Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- \_\_\_ Have my own personal psychotherapy
- \_\_\_ Write in a journal
- \_\_\_ Read literature that is unrelated to work
- \_\_\_ Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- \_\_\_ Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- \_\_\_ Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g, go to an art show, sports event, theatre
- \_\_\_ Receive from others
- \_\_\_ Be curious
- \_\_\_ Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- \_\_\_ Other:

### **Emotional Self-Care**

- \_\_\_ Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- \_\_\_ Stay in contact with important people in my life
- \_\_\_ Give myself affirmations, praise myself, love myself
- \_\_\_ Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- \_\_\_ Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- \_\_\_ Allow myself to cry
- \_\_\_ Find things that make me laugh
- \_\_\_ Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- \_\_\_ Other:

### **Spiritual self-care**

- \_\_\_ Make time for reflection
- \_\_\_ Spend time in nature
- \_\_\_ Find a spiritual connection or community
- \_\_\_ Be open to inspiration
- \_\_\_ Cherish my optimism and hope
- \_\_\_ Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- \_\_\_ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- \_\_\_ Be open to not knowing

- \_\_\_ Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- \_\_\_ Meditate, Pray
- \_\_\_ Have experiences of awe
- \_\_\_ Contribute to causes in which you believe
- \_\_\_ Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- \_\_\_ Other:

**Parenting Self-Care**

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**Overall Balance**

- \_\_\_ Balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

[http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self\\_care\\_assess.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self_care_assess.shtml)

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). Transforming the pain:

# RESOURCES

1. Wounded Children, Healing Homes by Jayne Schooler, Betsy Smalley and Tim Callahan
2. Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child by Betsy Smalley and Jayne Schooler
3. The Connected Child by Dr. Karyn Purvis ([www.empoweredtoconnect.com](http://www.empoweredtoconnect.com))
4. Beyond Consequences (Vol 1 and 11) by Heather Forbes
5. The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog by Dr. Bruce Perry
6. [www.child.tcu.edu](http://www.child.tcu.edu) – Trust Based Relational Intervention
7. [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org) (online university class resource)
8. National Child Traumatic Stress Network – multiple training resources for families - <http://www.nctsn.org/>

