

## Things I Have Learned Along the Way

*By: Sharon Behrens*

- **This is a journey you can't take by yourself.**
  - It takes a Healing Team of gatekeepers, knowledgeable providers of medical, psychiatric, developmental services, family and friends.
  - It does take a village to raise a child.
  - It is a task foster and adoptive families take on frequently unprepared for the damage that is uncovered.
- **Find the Team Leader!**
  - They coordinate
  - Mediate with other providers and services
  - Help assess/ keep track of all the complicated services and recommendations.
- A truly **valuable team member** has the ability to know when a consult or referral to another service provider lies in the best interest of the child.
- We learned to **never be afraid to change the players or the plan.**
  - The team had to challenge ourselves to think outside that "standard box" of care.
- Need to learn to live with the knowledge that there are **no quick fixes.**
  - We learned that it can be a bumpy treatment road that plays out over time.
  - It is the commitment of the team to stay in thru all the struggles that builds trust.
- **Trauma informed care is a very specific intervention treatment** that requires:
  - **Well trained professionals** – not just one class and a book!
  - **Thorough understanding of child development.**
    - Need to know what is normal or not able to assess the deviation from it and severity of the damage.
  - Early trauma is **pervasive thru all aspects of:**
    - Childs intellect/development
    - Emotions
    - Quality of interpersonal relationship
    - Physical systems
  - **Effective treatment plans MUST include input from the family and child.**
  - **Power plays** by any member of the team are **counter-productive** in formation of an effective treatment plan.

- **Understand that some things must be believed to be seen.** People who do not believe in the ability to change, heal and be resilient won't look for the different solution or be in it for the long haul.
  - You can't be a member of a healing team.
- Children are very **good observers** of their environment, but **poor interpreters**. Everything for children is shaded by their early environment.
  - Some triggers: noises, smells, a look, body language, shadows, tone of voice, colors, touch (too tight, too soft), textures (including food), holidays.
- **With expert support never doubt that motivated parents can learn to mediate in the lives of their traumatized children.**
- You need to know the experts and what skills they bring to the plan. There are many well meaning professionals, family and friends that can give very bad advice.
- **I am Teachable!**
  - I can learn to be powerful in the life of my child.
  - Teach me so I can reach my child.
- I love the concept: When we know better we do better.
  - Do not regret failed interventions. It is a process not a failure.
  - We eliminate many techniques but may revisit them later.
  - Patience, Patience with yourself, the child and the family.
- **We ask these children to be resilient, change, be flexible, be open to new ideas and hang in there for the long haul. Then why don't we ask it of ourselves?**
- To go forward we may have to safely re-visit the past.
- A brief moment of kindness may change everything for a child.
- A child of trauma is often not able to differentiate between painful, intrusive medical treatments and the pain inflicted by past abusers.
  - Medical procedures can be used to build trust.
  - Learning the lesson: I can be powerful in my own life.
- **Living in the past, holding tight to the trauma is toxic.**
  - Damage model- Reliving the trauma story thru many therapists.
    - Makes you feel unable. I am my trauma.
  - Challenge model - Live in the now but plan for the future.
    - Leads to healing and hopefulness.
    - I am more than my disabilities or trauma. I am much more.
- *Tomorrow is full of promise.*
- **The World is full of people who can impact in a positive way the life of you and your child.**

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