

Self-Care, continued from p. 1

overwhelming. To take good care of the kids, you need to take good care of yourself, too. Here are some suggestions:

- You don't have to do this alone--Get some practical help.
 - Be sure you have a good "second" and/or other supports (spouse, family, friends) to take some of the load off. You can't be in three places at once, so don't try. Call on others to help out when there are too many things to do, or even if you just need a break. **Finding good, reliable back-ups is the first step that helps make all the other self-care methods possible.**
 - You're not expected to know how to solve every problem. When issues come up, call your child's caseworker, therapist, or clinical department for suggestions and guidance. You don't have to wait for it to be an emergency before reaching out to others.

Sometimes, it takes another foster parent to understand. Come to meetings of Foster Parents United.

- **Get Support.**
 - Talk things over with a friend or family member.
 - Sometimes, it takes another foster parent to understand. Get to know the foster parents you see in the waiting room on visiting night, or the ones you take trainings with. Come to meetings of Foster Parents United. Find people who know what you're going through.
- **Take a break.** Call a back-up or second and do something for *you*.
 - See a movie
 - Read a book or magazine
 - Have a snack
 - Exercise can be a great way to relieve stress
 - Do whatever helps you get a break from being a caregiver

- **Pamper yourself.**
 - Take a warm bath
 - Put on some soothing music
 - Have a special meal
- **Relax**
 - Learn relaxation exercises. You can find many on the Internet.
 - Learn yoga
 - Learn to meditate
 - Pray
 - Or do whatever helps you put things in perspective
- Sometimes, just hearing what the kids have been through is extremely stressful. You may start to feel some of the same pain the kids feel. It may bring up things you have been through that you thought you put behind you.
 - You might sometimes want therapy for yourself, to deal with these issues or other things that are causing you stress. If you'd like, we can help you find a therapist.
 - You might want to talk with your religious leader.
- **Plan**
 - Make some self-care part of your routine, and give it priority. Don't try to squeeze it in at the last minute or only after everything else has been done. If you don't plan for it, it might never happen. Try to do it at a time and place where you can really experience it and enjoy it.

Taking care of kids is hard work. Taking care of yourself helps make it all possible and rewarding.

To be eligible to earn a \$25 free gift card, read the article above and find three ways to care for yourself. Call us at 718-232-1500 x310 or x338 with your answer. THE FIRST TWO CORRECT ANSWERS WIN!

Foster Parents United to meet Tuesday evenings for 4 weeks beginning January, 2017. Contact Dr. Robyn Harris, 718-232-1500 x338 for more information.

A View from Both Sides



Jalil McCready came into foster care at MercyFirst at age 17. Now an adult, he works in the IT Department.

Clinical Corner: What was the hardest part about being in foster care?

Jalil McCready: Being labeled as a foster kid. I did live a very hard life, but I always had my mom until she died when I was 13, and I always had my grandma, so I had never been in the system. Then this sudden shock: I'm in the foster system. I was a rebellious teen, and my grandma said, "Either follow my rules or this is the alternative."

CC: What do foster parents need to understand about what a child goes through?

JM: I would say, Make sure this is what you want to do. There's a lot of kids who don't know what it is to experience love and support. I was lucky enough to have experienced all that. But when you get a kid who doesn't have that, you have to convey to him that this is a situation he can have control over. You may have to take him to court and such, but this is what you signed up for, it wasn't to get one kind of kid

CC: What are some of the most helpful things a foster parent can do for a child?

JM: Love him.
A child that has experienced so much hurt and pain, the most important thing you can do is let him hear those words. All a lot of the kids want and need is love, trust me, to help them overcome that screen they put over them that no one knows is there. They say, "I'm gonna do me." But you can't go through life alone.

CC: What are some of the least helpful things a foster parent can do?

JM: Rejecting a kid. Not encouraging him. Not being a parent. You take out the "foster"

part, you're a parent.

CC: You've been both a client and an employee here. What has that been like?

JM: I've been lucky enough to experience both sides—the foster kid that's trying to get in touch with his caseworker, and trying to find guidance through my struggles; and then the adult, seeing what caseworkers go through and what foster parents go through, and that they're both hard jobs. And now I've got the people I work with, some of whom have become friends, that I call brother and sister, who I love.

CC: What was a key thing that helped you succeed?

JM: The desire to get out of foster care to be on my own. The fear of not having anything, of being another black kid that didn't become anything. I didn't want to be that, and I'm not that, and I had people to reassure me that that's something I would not become.

They say, "I'm gonna do me." But you can't go through life alone.

CC: Was there something a foster parent said or did that really stayed with you?

JM: Miss Gill, whenever I used to come home, she always used to say I'm her big grandson, and she always said something encouraging—"I want you to get rich and drive me around," "You're so handsome," she always used to say funny things like that.

CC: What would you like to say as your message to foster parents at MercyFirst?

JM: Be a parent, and not a landlord.
The foster kids, even the stubborn ones who are not going to school or not doing what they should—and before I came into foster care, I was that kid—they need a parent. And when foster parents get that kid who is a handful, instead of putting in a notice, really work with that kid and look at all the options.
Be a parent.



Ask Clinical!

My Toddler: “It’s been a long time since I had to take care of very young children. Could you give me some tips?”

The “Terrible Twos”:

Saying no is fun! Saying no can feel like the most important thing in the world! Your toddler needs to use “no” freely and often. Why??? Because this teaches her to be independent and self-sufficient. It may not look like it today, but this is the foundation for independence. Someday your child may have to use “no” to avoid being taken advantage of, to gain a promotion at work, to be assertive, to stay away from drugs or other poor choices. If a child is too fearful, she may not be able to defend herself when needed.

Here’s a fun game: When your stubborn, irrational toddler says NO for the umpteenth time, ask, “Do you want to say no?” See what she does or says, and remember, it’s a phase. The less you overreact, the quicker it passes.

Play:

Your toddler needs to play. HIS PLAY IS HIS WORK. Don’t worry about letters and numbers at this age; that will come later (Hey, let the teachers worry about it!). A child’s play is his way of practicing skills he will need later. Learning to play, using the imagination, solving puzzles, using the hands, legs, body parts, are all basic skills on which the child will build. Just as baby animals fight and play to learn skills they will need later to survive and thrive, so does the human child.

Tips: When your toddler is acting out or angry, get creative. Incorporate play to get him to do things. Make it fun.

OK, enough about fun. What are some **red flags**?

Many parents tell me their child is “busy”, maybe hyperactive, cannot concentrate, cannot sit still, into everything!!! Does this occur in all places, or only at home? She could be bored. Is she getting enough stimulation? Is she angry? Anxious?

Children exhibit hyperactive behavior for many reasons. **If you feel the child has an anger problem, here are some tips** (of course also, don’t hesitate to seek help from professionals at any time):

Try not to get angry. This is probably the most challenging but ultimately rewarding thing you can do. If you can be neutral, you may have more luck in getting the child to be less angry. If you can set limits in a positive, neutral tone, rather than an angry one, you’d be surprised how that can work.

Give the child choices. It’s ok to give up a little control. Choose your battles. Children need to feel some sense of control. Not control over the whole household, but it’s ok to let them choose the toy they want to play with. For example, for a child who won’t share, give him a choice: “Do you want to share toy A or B? Let’s put the one you don’t want to share in a special place only for you. That will be ‘the toy that is never shared.’” Learn to be a mediator and a negotiator. Your two-year-old will follow suit.



Finally, don’t take out your pain on your child. You may be dealing with conflicts with family members or birth family members, or money problems, health problems, all of the above. Your child is an innocent lamb. All she wants to do is be loved and accepted by you. And you deserve the same. Talk to a friend, mentor, or professional if you need support.



Nancy Julius, Psy.D., is one of our psychologists. She specializes in testing children from birth to three years old to see if there are any developmental issues that a child needs help with. All the little ones love “playing” with Dr. Julius when she sees them!

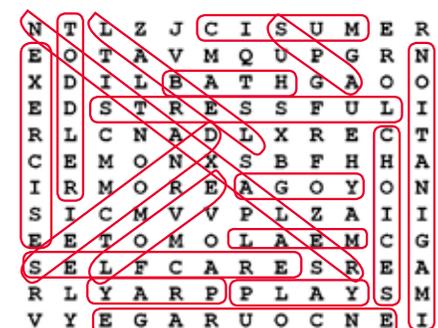
We Have a Winner!

Nilaja Troy won the prize for the contest in our Autumn 2016 issue by identifying three ways to help a child build a sense of future.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Word Search Answer

(from p. 1)



Have a problem or a question? Write us at “Ask Clinical,” Mercy-First, 6301 12th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11219, or call us at 718-232-1500 x337. We’ll try to help!

WIN A \$25 GIFT CARD IF YOUR QUESTION IS SELECTED.