

FOSTER SHARE 2

"Foster Share" is an informational flyer produced by the California Coalition of Foster Family Agencies (CCOFFA) for our California State Legislators

As we shared in the first edition of FOSTER SHARE, we know our State Legislators have to deal with thousands upon thousands of issues that cover hundreds of areas of interest, and it is impossible for any individual to understand all the nuances in any given arena, no less all of them. The purpose of this edition of FOSTER SHARE is to help our Legislators, or at least their staff, gain a deeper understanding regarding the challenges presented by the youth that are placed in Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) and group homes.

A youth cannot be placed in an FFA or group home unless they present with "special needs". Most commonly, a youth is defined as having "special needs" due to behavioral issues that present themselves as a result of abuse, molest, neglect, developmental delays, and prenatal and/or genetic factors. Below is a partial list of diagnoses that clients served by FFAs and group homes commonly possess. Youth may have just a single diagnosis, but it is more common for our clients to present two or more of these diagnoses simultaneously.

- **ADD** is a problem with inattentiveness, impulsivity, or a combination of the two behaviors. For these problems to be diagnosed as ADHD, they must be out of the normal range for the child's age and development and involve an abnormally high energy/activity level.
- **Antisocial Personality Disorder** is a psychiatric condition characterized by chronic behavior that manipulates, exploits, or violates the rights of others. This behavior is often criminal.
- **Anxiety Disorder** or Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is behavior marked by a pattern of frequent, persistent worry and anxiety over many different activities and events, inhibiting a person's ability to engage effectively in common social environments such as school, church, and/or other social gatherings.
- **Assorted medical issues:** It is not unusual for children in foster care to have a variety of medical issues which can include diabetes, HIV, hepatitis C, asthma, reflux problems, bronchial problems, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, shaken baby syndrome, speech and language delays, and global developmental delays.
- **Autism** is a complex developmental disorder that appears in the first 3 years of life, although it is sometimes diagnosed much later. It affects the brain's normal development of social and communication skills. Common features of autism include impaired social interactions, impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, problems processing information from the senses, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior. The symptoms may vary from moderate to severe.
- **Asperger Syndrome** is a condition marked by impaired social interactions and limited repetitive patterns of behavior. Motor milestones may be delayed and clumsiness is often observed. Asperger syndrome is very similar to, or may be the same as, high functioning autism (HFA).
- **Bipolar Disorder** Bipolar disorder is characterized by periods of excitability (mania) alternating with periods of depression. The "mood swings" between mania and depression can be very abrupt and debilitating.
- **Borderline Personality Disorder** is a condition characterized by impulsive actions, mood instability, and chaotic relationships.
- **Conduct Disorder** is a disorder of childhood and adolescence which involves chronic behavior problems such as defiant, impulsive behavior, antisocial behavior, drug use, or criminal activity.
- **Depression** is a disorder marked by persistent sadness, discouragement, loss of self-worth, and loss of interest in usual activities. Similar to depression, dysthymia is a chronic form of depression characterized by moods that are consistently low, but not as extreme as in other types of depression.
- **Developmental Delays** are when a child does not reach their developmental milestones (motor skills, verbal skills, social skills) at the expected times. Delays can occur in one or many areas.
- **Dyslexia**, also known as developmental reading disorder, is a reading disability resulting from the inability to process graphic symbols (written words).
- **Eating Disorders:** Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which a person refuses to stay at even the minimum body weight considered normal for their age and height. Persons with this disorder may have an intense fear of weight gain and a distorted body image. Inadequate eating or excessive exercising results in severe weight loss and can result in death. Bulimia is an illness defined by food binges, or recurrent episodes of significant overeating, that are accompanied by a sense of loss of control. The affected person then uses various methods, such as vomiting or laxative abuse, to prevent weight gain. Many, but not all, people with bulimia may also suffer from anorexia nervosa.
- **Failure to Thrive** is a description applied to babies and young children whose current weight or rate of weight gain is significantly below that of other children of similar age and sex.

- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome** refers to growth, mental, and physical problems that may occur in a baby when a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Since alcohol is a solvent, its use during pregnancy actually dissolves the fetus's neural pathways, resulting in permanent learning disabilities and challenges.
- **Histrionic Personality Disorder** involves a pattern of excessive emotional expression and attention-seeking, including an excessive need for approval and inappropriate seductiveness. It usually begins in adolescence.
- **Intermittent Explosive Disorder** is a disorder characterized by impulsive acts of aggression, as contrasted with planned violent or aggressive acts. The aggressive episodes may take the form of "spells" or "attacks," with symptoms beginning minutes to hours before the actual acting-out.
- **Juvenile Onset Schizophrenia** is a mental disorder than can manifest at puberty where it is difficult for a person to tell the difference between real and unreal experiences, to think logically, to have normal emotional responses to others, and to behave normally in social situations.
- **Learning Disabilities** are a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization, or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. Learning disabilities range in severity and invariably interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following important skills: oral language (e.g., listening, speaking, understanding); reading (e.g., decoding, comprehension); written language (e.g., spelling, written expression); and mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving). It is not unusual for a child who was exposed to their mother's substance abuse in utero to have learning disabilities.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder** - Obsessive-compulsive disorder consists of thinking too much on select subjects, "obsessing", engaging in repetitive, ritualistic behaviors, and doing things to try to stop the obsessive thoughts.
- **Oppositional Defiant Disorder** is a pattern of disobedient, hostile, and defiant behavior toward authority figures. To fit this diagnosis, the pattern must persist for at least 6 months and must go beyond the bounds of normal childhood misbehavior.
- **Pos-tox** (positive toxicity) is a condition where an infant is born addicted to drugs the mother was taking while pregnant and the infant has to go through withdrawals after birth. Most commonly, infants are born pos-tox for heroin, methamphetamines, cocaine, crack, etc.
- **PTSD** (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) is a kind of anxiety disorder. It can occur after a child has seen or experienced a traumatic event that involved molest, abuse, or the witnessing of a traumatic event. With PTSD, a word, sound, smell, or specific sight can make the victim instantly start re-experiencing the traumatic event, called a "flashback".
- **RAD** (Reactive Attachment Disorder) is a disturbance of social interaction caused by neglect of a child's basic physical and emotional needs, particularly during infancy. Babies placed in orphanages at birth and raised by multiple caretakers without consistent, primary parent-figures can also develop this disorder, even if physical care was adequate. RAD children are essentially incapable of bonding with people, have poor cause-and-effect reasoning, tend to be quite manipulative, and can exhibit sociopathic tendencies. As a side note, virtually all serial killers are considered to have been RAD as children, although only a small percentage of RAD children become that sociopathic.
- **Self injurious behaviors** may take on several forms, most commonly cutting, scraping, burning, biting or self-hitting. Physical and emotional scars may be left as a result of self-injury. Self destructive behaviors are not to be confused with body piercings or tattoos that are sought for the purpose of self-decoration.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder** - Social Anxiety Disorder is also called Social Phobia. It is sometimes thought of as a fear of social situations.

You periodically hear horror stories of foster children who have been in dozens of foster homes or group homes without finding a family willing to make them part of their home permanently. Children who have had this unfortunate experience in foster care most commonly have exhibited a number of the more socially challenging behaviors listed above such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Intermittent Explosive Disorder and/or Reactive Attachment Disorder. As you might imagine, youth exhibiting these types of behaviors on a consistent basis present a challenge to maintaining a safe, nurturing, and mostly calm and non-chaotic home environment, especially when there are other children in the home who could be impacted negatively by the behaviors and resultant tension.

CCOFFA member FFAs

A New Beginning FFA
 ABC Foster Family Agency
 Advantage Foster Family Agency
 Alannah Foster Family Agency
 Alpha Treatment Center
 Angels Foster Family Agency
 Arbitrator Foster Family Agency
 Ark Homes Foster Family Agency
 Atkinson Youth Services
 Beta Foster Care
 Better Choices, Inc./Ready for Life FFA
 Childhelp Foster Family Agency
 Children's Hope FFA
 Children's Plus FFA
 Children's Way FFA
 Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems

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 Families United
 Family Life Foundation, Inc.
 Family Linkage
 Family Solutions, Inc.
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 Fred Jefferson Memorial FFA
 Free to Be Programs
 Future Families
 Futuro Inafantil Hispano FFA
 Genesis Family Center
 Hosanna Homes
 HUGS FFA
 Interim Care FFA
 Kair In-Home Social Services, Inc.

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 Karing for Kids FFA
 Koinonia Family Services
 Krista Foster Homes
 Lighthouse Children & Family Services
 McKinley Children's Center FFA
 Mountain Circle Family Services, Inc
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 New Dimensions
 New Mellineum FFA
 Nuevo Amancer Latino Children's Services
 Olive Crest
 Open Line Foster Family Agency
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