

Organization & Contents

This Trainer's Manual contains detailed, scripted guides to each of nine sessions of training. Contents are organized by Session, beginning with the Orientation session and ending with *Parenting Skills Training* Session 8. Each session is devoted to a central theme. Each is linked conceptually throughout the sequence. Following the scripted session guides is an Appendix containing additional material that may prove helpful to the user.

Individual sessions are laid out similarly. Each begins with a title page followed by an Introduction to the session, a description of materials and preparations needed for the session and ending with a scripted Trainer's guide. Each section of the Manual is headed with the Session or section title. Pages are numbered by section. PowerPoint slides are contained both on CDs and on a DVD which are found in the accompanying disc package. CDs are included for those with older computers which may not have CD players built in. Each CD contains a separate *PST* session and is labeled accordingly. The DVD contains all PowerPoint slides for all nine sessions and is included for those with computers with built-in DVD players. A PowerPoint Reader is included with each disc. Users need not have PowerPoint software on their computers to access and show the slides. PowerPoint slides contain all audio and video clips that play as part of the presentation.

Included in this binder are both the scripted Trainer's Manual and a copy of the *PST* Participant Manual. The complete *PST* package includes another 8 Participant Manuals. This number is sufficient to train a group of eight families, which is the maximum group size we recommend. Additional Participant Manuals and other *PST* materials may be purchased from People Places through our website at www.peopleplaces.org or at 540-885-8841. Training for *PST* Trainers also is available from People Places. Contact us regarding fees and arrangements.

This Trainer's Manual is organized as follows.

Introduction. Overviews the *Parenting Skills Training* curriculum.

Orientation Session: *Who, What, Why*. Offers a system overview of foster and adoptive care. Includes current caregivers' perspectives and introduces participants to youth in care whose comments are included throughout the *PST*.

Session One: *The Teaching – Learning Journey*. Prepares participants to anticipate being changed by the caregiving experience. Summarizes the neurology of learning. Takes participants on a video-based walk through 'One Child's Journey'.

Session Two: *Relationship*. Emphasizes the power of relationship in learning and in shaping a child's view of self and the world. Explores the dynamics of Separation, Loss and Grieving. Offers perspective on children's connections to parents and siblings. Underscores the power of Empathy. Teaches the skill of True Listening.

Session Three: *Trauma*. Explores the impact of trauma on thoughts, feelings and behavior. Teaches a mindfulness technique for managing caregiver stress.

Session Four: *Strengths*. Presents specific skills for a strength-based approach to caregiving. Teaches Pure Descriptive Praise, high Praise Rate and Daily Connection skills.

Session Five: *The ABC Model –Analysis*. Introduces the ABC model of functional assessment. Teaches behavior analysis basics and goal-setting.

Session Six: *The ABC Model - Planning*. Demonstrates the use of a thorough assessment in developing in-home 'teaching' plans. Teaches skills for Difficult Conversations.

Session Seven: *Teaching Discipline*. Prepares caregivers to teach rather than coerce. Presents skills for Negotiating and Explaining a Plan, Negotiating Consequences and Delivering Consequences.

Session Eight: *Tying It All Together*. Includes material on Culture and identity and teaches the skill of Relationship Repair.

Appendix. Includes a session by session Trainer's Outline, Facilitation Tips for Trainers, an Appreciation and brief backgrounds of authors.

Parenting Skills Training



Introduction

Introduction

The *Parenting Skills Training (PST)* was first published in 1983 as an intensive pre-service curriculum for prospective therapeutic foster parents preparing to work with very challenging children and youth in their homes. At the time, the *PST* was the only such curriculum available to a growing number of therapeutic foster care (TFC) programs springing up around the U.S. In the 80's and 90's, it became the "official" preservice training for a number of statewide child welfare and mental health initiatives and continues to be used by dozens of programs in the U.S. and Canada.

Because the *PST* focuses on practical application, it has been used effectively in some interesting, if unanticipated, ways. Some TFC programs employ the training as an inservice for new foster caregivers to help them develop specific behavioral "teaching" plans for children in their homes. It also has been used with birth and adoptive parents of children who are at risk of institutional placement or who are returning to their own homes from such settings. It has been employed with parents with chronic mental health issues as a very explicit way to guide their responses to their children's troubling behavior. At this writing, the *PST* is being used in a number of "regular" foster care programs to help caregivers manage challenging youth behavior as well as their own emotional reactions to such behavior.

The *PST* today is relevant to anyone who parents children with challenging behaviors – and to those who assist them. Besides providing basic care and nurturance to these youngsters, these "therapeutic" caregivers are teachers whose classrooms are their own homes. Like effective teachers anywhere, they need good training as well as good intentions. They must create a sense of trust, safety and connection with frightened, suspicious and confused children. They must be both comfortable with their own authority and flexible in its exercise. And perhaps most important, they must acknowledge that helping guide a wounded child's journey places them on a parallel path of self-discovery and personal awareness.

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The 'New' PST

The *Parenting Skills Training* has proven remarkably durable since its initial publication in 1983. Participants continue to comment favorably on their training experiences and the value of what they have learned. Agencies continue to employ the curriculum and support the skills it teaches. The growing body of research on attachment, childhood trauma and the neurology of maltreatment tends to strengthen rather than diminish the importance of learning and learning-based approaches to behavior change. Narrative therapy and other cognitive-behavioral approaches have demonstrated efficacy in clinical applications to trauma recovery. Healing and learning clearly are connected. The *Parenting Skills Training* today may well rest on an even firmer conceptual and empirical foundation than it did more than two decades ago.

But two decades is a long time. New research and long experience have suggested ways to enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum. The original *PST* taught parents a set of core skills needed to help design and carry out individualized behavioral teaching plans in their homes. The new *PST* does the same. It continues to teach the basics of functional assessment using the ABC Model of *Antecedent – Behavior – Consequence*. The primary goal continues to be to help caregivers view a child's challenging behavior objectively rather than take it personally; to respond and connect rather than react; to teach and encourage rather than punish. To accomplish this, the new *PST* places even greater emphasis on the antecedent side of the ABC behavioral equation – putting understanding of problem 'triggers' before the delivery of consequences.

Among the most important antecedents to challenging behavior are the effects of experience – especially traumatic experience - on brain functioning and behavior. The new *PST* includes information on the neurology of maltreatment that helps parents step back and develop a more complete understanding of a child's behavior.

The original *PST* emphasized the role of caregiver as change agent, but in a manner that in retrospect failed to highlight the fact that change

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goes two ways. The new *PST* seeks to prepare caregivers both to change and be changed. In

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doing so, it includes content and exercises that help caregivers focus on themselves and their families as well as on the children they care for in their homes.

This focus is relevant for anyone who parents children with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities. We know that permanence is a primary goal for children in foster care. Many are able to return to their own families after a temporary stay in a foster home. Others are adopted or remain in care until independence. Increasingly, TFC offers a pathway to permanence. It may function as a shorter term placement option giving families a chance to build stronger relationships and children an opportunity to heal and learn. It can serve as a living 'school' for independence for youth who cannot return home and are not adopted. In recent years, the majority of children adopted from the foster care system have been adopted by foster parents – many of them therapeutic foster parents.

Children who enter therapeutic foster care – regardless of their permanency goal – typically have had early experiences that left them “attachment averse”. Unfortunately, their behavior often promotes distance rather than closeness and triggers defensive rather than protective responses from caregivers. Those who care for these children must manage their own emotions *and* the behavior of the children in their care. They cannot do one effectively without doing the other as well. They need skills for feelings and for behavior; skills for teaching children and skills for managing themselves. The new *PST* adds a focus on self-awareness and self-management to help all caregivers be mindful of their own attitudes and behavior as they seek to help youth with theirs.

An effective behavior plan must be based on accurate assessment and be properly designed. The original *PST* focused largely on *what* parents should do to develop and carry out positive, effective behavior plans. One of the lessons of day-to-day experience in therapeutic foster care is that the mechanics of assessment and design are only part of what makes a behavior plan work. The other part is the *how*. *How* a parent relates to the child creates a context that can either amplify or diminish the power of a sound plan. The quality of the relationship is critical.

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But relationships must be forged, not forced. And there is no guaranteed way to forge a deep and genuine connection with a relationship-averse child. Caregivers *can*, however, be aware of and responsible for themselves. They have the power to remain open and responsive, calm and safe, curious and patient, gentle and in charge. They can learn to be enthusiastic coaches, concerned teachers, and trustworthy adults comfortable with their own authority. In the latter regard, they can learn to handle difficult conversations that are charged with emotion – both theirs and the child’s - and when to postpone those conversations to a time when they are better prepared for them. The new *PST* includes *Difficult Conversations* as a skill most parents will need to call on when developing or evolving a relationship with a troubled youth.

The original *PST* introduced two other relationship-building strategies that fit logically into the ABC framework: Positive Scan and Positive Time. We have retained these essential skills in the new *PST*, but changed the terminology. Instead of ‘Positive Scan’, we refer to a high ‘*Praise Rate*’ to make the language simpler and less mechanical. ‘Positive Time’ has become ‘*Daily Connection*’ in the new *PST* to underscore the fundamental importance of relationship in therapeutic care giving. The research basis for both skills may be found in a number of studies beginning with the pioneering work of Gerald Patterson, John Reid and others at the Oregon Social Learning Center (see, for example, Patterson, 1982; and Patterson, Reid, Jones & Conger, 1975). Such studies have confirmed the common-sense notion that quality parent-child time each day combined with a high rate of parent praise for desirable behavior tend to promote positive behavior change.

The attachment and child trauma literature – particularly the work of Judith Cohen, Doug Bremner, Rick Delaney, Daniel Hughes, Richard Kagan, Bruce Perry, Daniel Siegel and Bessel Van der Kock – suggest that emotional connection is at the heart of healing. Trauma recovery and the capacity to make interpersonal connections both involve learning in a fundamental, neurological sense. Neuroscience has taught us that memories are indexed by the feelings associated with them. Traumatic experiences create memories and trace neural pathways that may block or limit a child’s ability to trust and connect. It is important that children experience safety and nurturance in relationship with a

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caregiver with whom they connect emotionally and who can model the skills for feelings their recovery demands.

Perhaps the most important emotional competence a caregiver can bring to the task of therapeutic care-giving is the ability to empathize – to accurately read and respond to a child's feelings. The new *PST* includes specific skills intended to promote participants' ability to summon and communicate empathy: *True Listening* and *Repair*. True Listening and Repair build on the original *PST* skills of Pure Descriptive Praise, Positive Scan and Easy Listening to deepen the meaning of parent-child "communication". Both are linked to significant work in the attachment and child trauma fields and by our own direct experience with children and families over several decades. Using True Listening, a parent attends both to the content of what a child says and to the feelings behind the words. Using Repair (see Siegel, 2003), a parent acknowledges a mistake or a hurtful behavior and apologizes in a way that is genuine and which models a healthy and assertive way to deal with interpersonal conflicts.

True Listening and Repair are powerful tools in building and maintaining relationship. Both are also challenging for caregivers who struggle to manage their own troubling feelings toward youth who may disrespect their authority and appear to disregard their attempts to nurture and help. We feel both skills are best addressed in preservice to help caregivers develop realistic expectations about the journey ahead and to acquire the skills needed to make the journey successfully.

The revised *PST* adds a skill section on '*Teaching Discipline*', an area often overlooked in discussions of limit-setting and the use of negative consequences to weaken behavior. The new section emphasizes the nature of true 'discipline' as an internalized set of principles that guide behavior rather than as a set of external punishment procedures. It retains much of the original *PST* discussion regarding 'punishment', but includes an introductory activity intended to clarify participants' values around the issue of discipline and the use of punishment. It also includes an emphasis on 'exercising' discipline as a parent as well as 'teaching' discipline to a child.

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The revised *PST* includes original teaching exercises that have withstood the test of time, and eliminates others we have found less effective or redundant. Wherever applicable, we have created experiential exercises to complement skill-teaching segments so as to add emotional valence to important lessons. We have retained the signature *PST* emphasis on ABC planning for real children during the course of training. We recognize, however, that not all participants have children in their care with whom to work and that training time may not always be sufficient to complete sound ABC plans with every participant/couple. For that reason, we also have added ‘Rosa’s Story’, an actual life narrative written by a child in therapeutic foster care. Rosa’s Story creates an opportunity for participants without children in their homes to practice elements of ABC planning. It also provides the kind of ‘back story’ to current behavior that can deepen and broaden our understanding of how and why children come to do the things they do.

Also new to the revised *PST* are video clips of parents and experienced therapeutic caregivers sharing their comments on relevant elements of the work they do. We also have included video interview segments from an exceptional youth in care – Shawn – who entered foster care at age 4 and was 18 at the time of publication. Shawn and Rosa offer youths’ perspectives on major themes that are critical to understanding their needs, hopes and challenges. All video and audio elements are imbedded in PowerPoint slides so that users need only have a computer, external speakers and a LCD projector to display audio-visual components of the new *PST*.

PST Structure and Approach

The *Parenting Skills Training* is presented in nine weekly three-hour sessions plus between-session “homework” assignments of approximately 30 – 60 minutes each. The curriculum design favors “distributed” versus “massed” practice. Between-session activities guide participants in applying skills addressed initially in the more formal group training setting. While the training period may be extended beyond the nine-week format presented here, it should not be condensed into a shorter period. With birth parent groups, for example, skill rehearsals may need to be repeated and additional weeks/sessions

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scheduled to cover essential content areas. Other modifications of the curriculum for family

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preservation applications may include weekly home visits or contracts and incentives to help parents complete homework assignments.

The revised *Parenting Skills Training* is not intended as an “all you ever wanted to know about parenting” experience. The aim is to teach a few fundamental skills well rather than to cover a multitude of topics superficially. Content is focused on a set of “core” positive parenting skills, most of which may be rehearsed during training, applied in between-session “homework” assignments and measured with regard to degree and quality of acquisition. Because the training approach is quite intensive, the *PST* is designed for relatively small participant groups of 6 to 8 families – whether single or two-parent.

Each session of the *PST* addresses a major theme with related information and skills. Skills are drawn from research linked to the theme and to evidence of efficacy in practice. Each session except the first, ‘Orientation Session’, includes an interpersonal parenting skill which is rehearsed and applied as “homework” to promote generalization of learning. By the end of training, participants have ‘walked through’ most of the central tasks required of therapeutic caregivers regarding problem assessment, intervention and evaluation. As a result, staff should be able to identify priority areas for each parent/couple for further training and support.

Social skills training procedures are used to teach core interpersonal skills. The process begins by breaking each skill down into component parts. Participants then learn to identify the skill steps, view a demonstration or model of the skill, rehearse the skill in a role-play situation, and apply it at home as a structured “homework” assignment. We also use this procedure with children and youth to develop pro-social skills identified as individual treatment goals and in independent living skills group training for adolescents.

The ABC Model

At the heart of the *Parenting Skills Training* – and of People Places’ treatment approach generally – is the ABC model: **A**ntecedent, **B**ehavior, **C**onsequence. The ABC model provides a conceptual

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framework for problem analysis and intervention and links the specific skills presented in this training. Participants

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learn to pinpoint problems in behaviorally specific terms, to identify antecedent “triggers” and reinforcing consequences. They also learn to define pro-social “teaching goal” alternatives to problem behavior and to apply antecedent and consequence strategies designed to cue and reinforce teaching goal behavior. The ABC model offers a way of thinking and communicating about problems and solutions which may be learned by all key individuals in the treatment process including children, youth, their families, caregivers, therapists and program staff. Such a common language is critical to establishing consistency across the many settings a youngster experiences in normal community living.

A thorough grounding in ABC behavior analysis and planning is essential for trainers leading the *Parenting Skills Training*. For those unfamiliar with functional assessment procedures, People Places offers a companion training program for staff: *The ABCs of In-Home Problem Solving*. The program introduces the ABC model through interactive print and video materials and includes a Reference Manual offering 60 sample ABC plans for a variety of problems typically encountered with youth who present emotional and behavioral challenges. Several citations are listed below for those interested in further reading about the ABC model and related research.

PST Content

The *Parenting Skills Training* is designed to help equip caregivers with the knowledge, skill and awareness needed to begin their experience as therapeutic foster and adoptive parents. Emphasis is on relationship and on understanding and responding to challenging behavior. Because effective therapeutic parenting is a mutual learning experience involving both caregivers and children, the curriculum includes skills for managing one’s self as well as others.

The major themes addressed in the nine *PST* sessions are:

Orientation: *Who, What,
Why*

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Session One: *The Teaching – Learning Journey*

Session Two:
Relationship

Session Three:
Trauma

Session Four: *Strengths*

Session Five: *The ABC Model –*

Analysis **Session Six:** The ABC

Model - Planning **Session Seven:**

Teaching Discipline **Session Eight:**

Tying It All Together

Using the PST: Practical Notes for Trainers

Now for the basics: how do you as a Trainer use this curriculum? How is it laid out, how do you follow this Manual and what do you need to know to be ready to lead a group? Be sure to read this section so you understand how the components are organized and intended to be used. More general tips on how to provide effective training are offered in the Appendix to this Manual: “Facilitation Tips for Trainers”.

The *PST* is divided into 9 discrete sessions, referenced above, and offered through three basic components: the *Trainer’s Manual*, *PowerPoint presentations*, and *Participant Manuals* for each of the nine sessions.

The Trainer’s Manual

This Manual is organized by session, beginning with the initial Orientation session. Each session is laid out in a similar fashion. Each begins with an ‘Introduction’ that overviews the session content and purpose. Read this to get a sense of the session you are preparing to facilitate. Following the Introduction, you will find a list of things you need to do or have ready to use before the session begins. Refer to this list in preparing for the session. Next, you will find a ‘Trainer’s Outline’ of the major themes and activities of the session. The outline will serve as your quick reference guide as you move through the session. It does not provide content detail, but with the PowerPoint slides will help you follow the flow of the session without fumbling for the proper page in the scripted portion of the Manual for that session. After the Outline, you

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will find a fully scripted version of the session. In this section, you will find detailed descriptions of each activity and of the major points to be made. Study the scripted portion of each session before you train. Become closely familiar with the specific

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content and sequence of the session to prepare to guide discussion and surface the essential points identified in each. You may find it useful to make marginal notes on the Trainer's Outline for each session to use as further reference while you train.

At the end of some of the scripted sections of the Manual, you will find copy masters of handouts to prepare beforehand to distribute to participants during the session. These are clearly referenced in the scripted portion of the Manual.

PowerPoint Slides

Each of the nine *PST* sessions includes a PowerPoint presentation designed both to offer information and to guide the sequence of training. The Trainer's Manual describes each slide by number and name. For example, the first slide of the Orientation Session is referenced as Slide #OR -1, the second as Slide #OR-2 and so on. In Session One, the first slide is referenced as Slide #1-1, the second as Slide #1-2 and so on.

PowerPoint presentations are offered in two formats: CD and DVD. Both are found in the disc holder that comes with the *PST* package. CDs are included for user's with older computers that do not have built in DVD players. There are nine CDs – one for each *PST* session - included in the package. For those with DVD players built in to their computers, there is a single DVD disc included in the package. This DVD disc contains all nine *PST* sessions. You may use either CD or DVD depending on the capacity of your computer. The Trainer's Manual provides detailed descriptions of the animation sequence of each slide. Be sure to go through the PowerPoint slides before each session so that you are familiar with the sequence of the slide show itself and with the 'click' sequence of the animations for each slide.

Audio and video clips are imbedded in the PowerPoint presentations. Most audio clips are played by 'clicking' on the sound icon that appears in the body of slide. When this is not the case, audio will begin with a single additional 'click'. The Trainer's Manual will alert you to any such exceptions.

You will not need a separate video player to access imbedded video

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elements. You WILL need, however, a PC computer with at least the capacity to play CDs

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(sorry, we haven't built this for MACS yet), powered speakers to amplify sound, a LCD projector and a screen or wall space for projection. Video clips play automatically when you click to open the slide containing them. Once you click to a slide with video, there is no need to click again to make it play. Be patient. If you click to hasten video play, you may disrupt the video sequence and cause unnecessary and irritating 'glitches' in the video sequence. Be sure to view all slides before you train a session and to become familiar with how each plays.

Participant Manual

Each participant family – whether single or two-parent – receives a Participant Manual at the beginning of Session One. At People Places, we wait to distribute Manuals until we know which families will continue beyond Orientation. The Participant Manuals contain all materials needed by both members of a two- parent family. There are two copies of individual pages that are needed by both members of a couple. Pages are perforated to allow easy removal when called for. The Manuals are used during sessions. Participants should be reminded to bring their Participant Manuals with them to each session.

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