

TOPIC:

Parenting 911: When Things Get Tough

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

**Read through this self-study*

**Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire*

**Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

We have something here at ACRF we call **"Parenting 911: When Things Get Tough."** We work with a lot of families caring for kids with really tough behaviors. We encourage our families to think ahead and have a plan for when things get really tough. So take some time and plan what to do if you have a child who is winding out-of-control and you have to use **"Parenting 911"** We use the idea of a city traffic light-- start by considering situations as **green** light, **yellow** light and **red** light situations and plan from there.



Green Light: When Calm, Plan Ahead

It is hard to think when you are upset so do some serious thinking while you are calm. Find some time when you are calm and **THINK!** Develop a plan and write it down. Practice it like you do a fire drill—especially with your kids. Work on verbal cues with your child and let them know that your first job is to keep all family members safe. Develop a personal Family Safety Plan. When you are calm, take time to gather and write down your emergency numbers. Have a designated notebook to keep everything in one place so you can always find it. Put emergency numbers on your cell phone for easy access (such as under EMERGENC Y.)

Things to have in place for your child in one place.

- List of phone numbers (see above)
- Current diagnosis for child
- Folder with all treatment records
- Medications (always have a supply) with directions
- Person on-call to transport the child or to provide a break for the child in their home
- Person on-call to care for other children in the home if one child needs to be taken elsewhere
- Copy of the child's insurance card
- For foster families—Consent for Emergency or Routine Medical Care

Think about an Ongoing Respite plan:

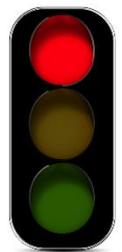
- For many families, an ongoing respite or "break" plan can provide space and breathing time for kids and parents. Respite should not be punitive but a normal break for families.
- For older children: If possible, have them come up with a friend (with permission to talk to parents) that they can go stay with for a couple of hours or plan for an overnight to get respite.
- Respite for one child in the home can allow for individual parenting time for others in the home.
- Respite should not be a result of crisis, but a couple hours or overnight that is planned for the benefit of the whole family.



Yellow Light: *Urgency, Not Emergency* Yellow light means *caution, slow down*. So pay attention when things start to heat up---slow things down, and take action. This is where you should spend most of your time avoiding getting yourself in a Red Light Situation if possible.

- **CALM YOURSELF FIRST!** You cannot control the situation if you don't have control of yourself. Kick into your thinking mode and don't get hooked into losing control. Bring the energy in the room down or at least don't add to it. Don't take it personally
- Use your language to de-escalate the situation. Control your level and tone. Consciously speak lower, softer and slower.
- Talk to yourself in your head to keep in your thinking brain—don't flip your lid and join in the chaos. Someone has to remain the adult in the room.
- If the emotion is too heated in the room, don't try to problem solve or discipline when others are out of control. Focus on bringing down the heat by reassuring others you are listening and care about them even if you are not in agreement. You can come back and work it out when things are calmer.
- Remember your Family Safety Plan— If you and your family can talk about these situations ahead of time, now it's time to remind yourself and the child what you planned. What's your internal or external Break Plan? Is it time to use it to prevent things from escalating?

One experienced adoptive parent says, "Is this your first time with a blow up? Then keep it in perspective. This might be your new normal." Children who have been traumatized may have a pattern of overreacting or seeking chaos. Develop the skills you need to not take it personally and to determine which battles to fight. You got this!



Red Light: *Emergency!—Safety is your first Priority*

Red Light situations mean that the situation is so heated up that someone is going to get hurt or is putting themselves or others in danger. Always remember, *Safety is Your First Priority*.

- Avoid putting your hands on a child or youth to overcome, grab, fight him, or restrain him in an aggressive way. Know that physical interaction is going to escalate the situation. If you have to use force to prevent a child from hurting another child or himself, use just enough physical contact to stop the interaction then release as soon as you are able. "Hands on" usually escalates the situation & increases the chance of physical harm to you or the child so avoid it if possible.
- Continue to use your de-escalation skills—talk slowly and reassuring, avoid raising your voice, give positives when a child shows compliance or self-control, give gentle simple commands and use the child's name (Put the lamp down, Sammy. Come sit on the couch. We can work this out. Take a deep breath with me.) Don't lecture or threaten.
- If serious physical threats, impending harm, or weapons are involved, direct other out of the room (if needed into a locked room). Call 911 or law enforcement for assistance if necessary.
- Some hospital emergency rooms also have a psychiatric emergency service that you can contact by phone for guidance. (Did you put this number in your phone?)
- Call your local OCS Office using whatever after hours emergency protocol you have or try calling the statewide Intake number at 1-800-478-4444 for guidance.



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