



# CLINICAL CORNER

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 AT MERCYFIRST'S FAMILY FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

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Tips, Guides, and Information to Help You with Your Foster Child

In This Issue: \*Emotional Intelligence \* Ask Clinical: What Is Normal Development in an Infant and a Toddler? \* Foster Parent Interview \* Tips and Pointers \* Games\* AND MORE!

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## WORD SEARCH

Find these words that have to do with stories in this issue:

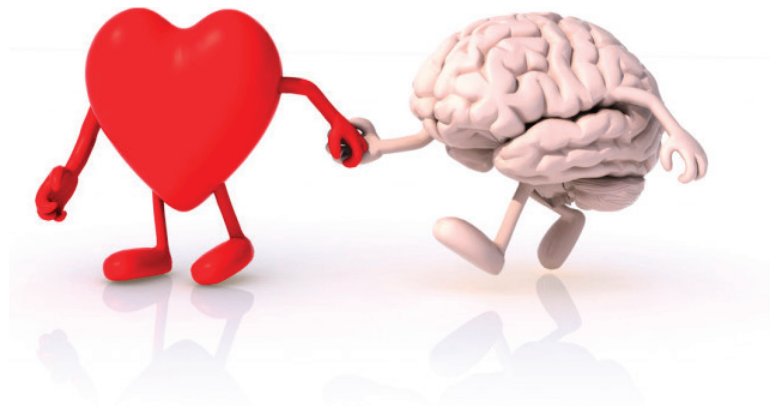
- |              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| EMOTIONAL    | MOTOR     |
| INTELLIGENCE | SENSORY   |
| DEVELOPMENT  | TODDLER   |
| EMPATHY      | SUMMER    |
| IDENTIFYING  | SKILLS    |
| FOSTERING    | THERAPIST |
| SPECIAL      | FAMILY    |
| NEEDS        |           |

Words can be forward, backward, up, down, or diagonal.

Answer on p. 4

I D E N T I F Y I N G A  
 N T N E M P O L E V E D  
 T B S F O S T E R I N G  
 E C E T T D D E F Y R G  
 L L N S O S K J H E I H  
 L A S I R F L T L M N S  
 I I O P R Q A D P O L U  
 G C R A S P D M T L U M  
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 N P Z E T A B K C L D E  
 C S J H I H S G F E Y R  
 E M O T I O N A L K M O

## Emotional Intelligence: We've All Got It!



You've just come home from a family visit at the agency. Things seem to have gone fine, and your six-year-old appears calm and cheerful—but when you tell her to brush her teeth and get ready for bed, you're suddenly faced with refusals, yelling, and the biggest temper tantrum you've ever seen. What happened?

You'll need to use your emotional intelligence to figure it out.

Continued on, p. 2

## Emotional Intelligence, continued from p. 1

**Emotional intelligence** is a set of skills that help you understand and respond to what you or another person is feeling. It can include:

- Identifying, or labeling, emotions in yourself or others
- Empathy—being able to figure out what someone is probably feeling, and being able to feel it along with them
- Figuring out how to approach someone or respond to them, based on what they are feeling
- Creative use of your own emotions and experience

Let's go back to the child who is having the meltdown after visiting with her family. What's going on? The first thing you'll probably do is ask her—always a good first step—but right now the child is screaming, “No! No!” to everything. What to do?

Well, we could make it a discipline issue—clearly, the child is not following the rules and is being disobedient, maybe even disrespectful. We might think, We can't just accept this behavior. But is that the whole story?

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### Emotional intelligence helps you understand and respond to what someone is feeling.

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Let's start by **identifying the emotion**: what is the child feeling? There's a lot of anger, which is obvious from the yelling and stomping. Is that all? Well, the child could also be feeling sad—even if the visit was wonderful, she still had to say goodbye to her parents again, and had to go home with you instead of them.

These are feelings we can **empathize** with—we can understand a little how the child is feeling. Let's think even further. She is already sad, and now here it is bedtime, and you're telling her to get ready and brush her teeth—probably something her mom would have been doing if she were home. Add to this that it's late, the child may be tired after an exciting day, and now she may not have the resources to deal in a better way with her sad and angry feelings. The child's behavior is beginning to make a little more sense to us.

Maybe there's even something in **your own experience** that might apply. Remember that summer you visited your aunt? It was great playing with your cousins, but you still missed your mom. Sometimes you didn't even want to do what your aunt said, because she wasn't your mom and she didn't do things the same way your mom did. You didn't have a meltdown, but then again, you knew exactly when you'd be going home, and you were

even a little older than your foster child is now.

So now we have a little emotional understanding. How can we use this to help us **figure out how to approach** this tantruming child?

We see that our first idea—approaching it as a discipline issue—probably won't be very helpful. The child isn't in control of her feelings right now, and giving her a consequence or telling her to stop misbehaving may just set her off even more.

So, how might you approach someone who is struggling with angry and sad feelings—and who might not want to accept any approach from you, because you're not her birth mother?

You might try **just waiting her out**. As long as she's not doing serious harm to herself, another, or property, there's nothing wrong with this, and it may give her the time to gain more control so your other ideas have a better chance of working. It might seem like you're doing nothing, but sometimes nothing is the best thing to do.

You could **help her calm down**. This works best if you've already practiced it with her in the past and worked out together some techniques that work for her. You could coach her to take some deep breaths, or count to ten, or sit quietly for a few minutes, or listen to music, or whatever the two of you have found works for her.

If she seems ready, you could try again **asking her what happened or what she is upset about**.

You could **identify the feelings out loud**: “You seem pretty sad and angry.”

You could **empathize**: “I bet it was hard, having to say goodbye to your parents tonight.”

**You might not even need words right away. Sometimes just a touch**, or motioning for her to sit next to you, can be calming and communicate your understanding and caring.

The above example was for a young child. Teens may be harder to figure out at times, but we still use the same basic tools. Emotional intelligence is something we all have and use—and it's worth using even more often.



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## Clinical Corner Interview

### One Foster Parent's Experience



Takieya Robinson has been a foster parent with MercyFirst for five years.

**Clinical Corner:** How did you first decide to do become a foster parent?

**Takieya Robinson:** I just decided that I really wanted to help children in need, and give them a chance to be part of the family and experience things they never would have had the chance to experience. All of them have been young children, starting under the age of four. Two are already free and in the process of being adopted by me.

I've had both special needs children and children who aren't. Working with special needs children is more difficult, because sometimes you forget that they have special needs, they just look like kids. You need more patience.

**CC:** What do you get out of fostering children that keeps you doing it?

**TR:** It just makes me feel good that I'm able to step in and teach, let them see that better days are ahead. It gives me great joy and pleasure to help them grow and help them understand that the situation they were in is not what's going to define them later on in life.

I think I get more out of it now than I did in the beginning. In the beginning it was a little trying, frustrating. I had to get my feet wet. Now I've warmed up to it and am finding my place and what I wanted to do. I went into it thinking it was going to be easier than it turned out to be.

**CC:** Have there been any particularly memorable moments for you?

**TR:** The most memorable things for me are when the children I have tell me how much they love me and how much of a great job I'm doing—because I know they understand that they have the support, and it re-

assures me that I'm reassuring them that they have the love.

**CC:** Do you have advice for other foster parents or for people who are thinking of becoming foster parents?

**TR:** Come into the situation with an open mind. Don't have a preconceived notion what you think it will be like. Be very patient—very firm in your beliefs, but very patient at the same time. Have a lot of compassion and a lot of empathy, and have a clear understanding of why you are doing it.

If you're in it for the right reason and the long haul, it can be a very rewarding experience at the end to know even that you could help one child. You have to make sure your heart, your head, your family, everyone is on the same page when you become a fostering family. When you get the children in the house and hear their stories, it can be very difficult.

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*Being a fostering family is a complete family effort.*

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**CC:** What is that like for you, being aware of their traumas?

**TR:** It's hard. It's going to take some time, some patience, and working closely with the therapist—making sure that you're open and honest about what you see with the child and what happens in your house. You have to be open to the process. If you do not understand a behavior or a diagnosis, make sure to ask questions. It will help you better assist that child in what they're going through.

**CC:** How has fostering changed your family?

**TR:** To me, not much, because I have a crazy, wonderful family already. All the good that my family already had was just highlighted—it allowed me to see, for immediate and extended family, how much love we have for everyone, we accept everyone as family. It brought my family even closer together. All the days that I was upset and wanted to give up, if it wasn't for my family being the great support system that they are, I don't know what I would have done. It made us stronger. They reminded me why I'm doing it. It's a complete family effort.



## Ask Clinical!

### I'm taking care of a toddler now, and want to be sure she's developing normally. What should I be looking out for?

Your toddler is growing in all kinds of ways. She may be learning to use a crayon, communicate through language and in other ways, and run. She may be developing playground skills and learning to share.

Enjoy these new skills—and if something doesn't look right, have your Case Planner request a developmental assessment. With so much developing at once, the sooner a child who needs help can be identified and helped, the better off she will be!

Here are some ways your toddler is developing, and some red flags as well:

**Language:** Remember the babbling stage? That was practicing language. Now she is imitating you, learning new words, and also trying to make sentences and to put the words together. She should be learning to point and use gestures along with the language. Observe whether your child is beginning to identify objects in the environment, and to follow one direction. She should be producing words, acknowledging questions. By age 2, children communicate using words and gestures and produce 2-word combinations such as "I go." **Red flags: Not talking, not attempting to talk or communicate.**

**Movement:** Gross Motor: These are large muscle skills. Your child should be moving her limbs independently and developing muscle strength. Can she sit and stand independently? Lift head easily? She should be able to move limbs easily and to support herself. The two body sides should appear equal. She should be able to reach, to climb on an adult chair, and by 21 months, to move on a ride-on toy (without pedals). By aged 2 she should be able to balance, fling a ball forward, and kick a ball. **Red flags: weak muscles, rigid muscles, frequent falling, awkwardness or clumsiness.**

Fine Motor: Fine motor skills involve smaller muscles. She should be able to grasp objects and to release them, and to transfer objects from one hand to the other. Can she use tools? Construct a tower? Does your child have a sense of herself in space?

**Brain Development:** This includes attention, memory, problem solving, social cognition, and complexity of play.

Attention: Your toddler is learning to focus her attention, and sustain interest. She may look at books or pictures while you name them. By age 21 months she should be able to pay attention to the lead of others (look at what others look at, and do what others do).

Memory: Your toddler is begging to recognize pictures and objects by pointing. By age 2, she can talk about events of the recent past, and can dramatize remembered events (like in a play!).

Problem Solving: Your toddler should be exploring toys with purpose, using trial and error to activate them or asking an adult for help. She uses real objects to solve a problem; for example, she may push a chair up to something in order to climb up and get to the cookie jar!

Social Cognition: Your child is beginning to know that her actions cause a reaction in others. She looks to see how an adult reacts to her actions. And she shows concern for another's distress. By age 2, she can comfort another child, and can use "feeling" words such as "happy." She may still have difficulty sharing or will take another's toy without concern for her feelings. She anticipates what will happen if she misbehaves.

Complexity of Play: At this stage your toddler will like toys that "do" something. She uses objects in play, such as a phone or comb. She enjoys water play, and may like to take care of a doll. This is the stage of "parallel play," where children play alongside each other, not necessarily interacting. They know the other is there though!!! By age 2, she will begin to share, and uses more pretend play such as play cooking. She will love chase games. And she will love to share her humor with you.

It's a wonderful stage—and a great time to know what to look for!



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!

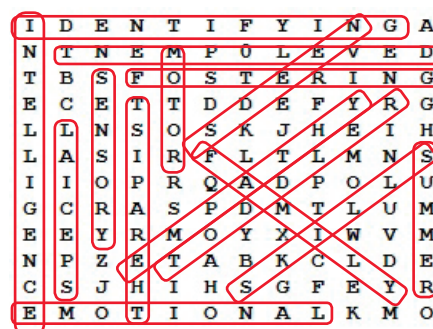
### Winners!

We have two winners for our Winter 2016/2017 contest: Nadeyge Alexandre and Rose Cobo each identified three ways to practice self-care.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**

### Word Search Answer

(from p. 1)



Have a problem or a question? Write us at "Ask Clinical," MercyFirst, 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.**