



How Much is Enough?



Over the last several years God has been teaching me that my children are in desperate need of grace. Many of them have not been fully raised by me, and have been exposed to behaviors and trauma that no one would wish on their worst enemy. My husband, Jonathan, and I get little glimpses into the world they came from, and quite honestly it's heart breaking.

Many times when I am sharing my testimony with others, whether it be in a training or just a curious stranger, many times the response is I couldn't do what you do, I don't want those behaviors/trauma in my home. Sadly, the truth is you bring in a trauma child/children everybody in the home becomes a victim of trauma. My heart has been broken more times that I can count, but ultimately it's not because of my children's behaviors, but because I know there is a reason behind their behaviors and that these behaviors are just a product of their abuse, neglect and trauma.

As Christians we are perfectly content to load up the school bus on youth group

night or Sunday mornings, but past this just send them home, let them be someone else's problem throughout the week and we will just say a quick prayer for them during prayer meeting or our morning coffee. "This should be enough," we think.

But is it really enough? The number of children in KS in out of home care is drastically growing. Three years ago it was just over 5000 and now it sits at over 6500. With only 2500 foster homes, these children aren't getting the attention, love and compassion they need and I would challenge you that it is not what God means when He says in James 1:27, "that we are to care for widows and orphans in their distress."

I don't know about you, but I'm a desperately wicked person who desperately needed a perfect savior, and He didn't just pick me up once or twice a week, but He daily walks with me, He is my rock and my fortress, and carries me through my deepest darkest times, where there seems like there is no hope. He shows me right from wrong, He pulls me out of the depths of

my despair and LOVES me! Yes, He loves sinful, imperfect me! He doesn't say, "But Allison, you are a murderer, an adulterer, and a liar at heart, I cannot help you." He gently says my precious child, follow me, trust in me and you shall have an eternal life in Heaven with me.

We as the church are foolish to believe that these children are someone else's problem. 75% or more of our prison population are young men who have aged out of foster care and young women who age out are 600% more likely to end up on welfare and losing their children back to the system. They become our million dollar babies, and honestly are never not our problem. Christ never said you can be my problem, but I'll love you from a distance, I'll pay for you while you are in bondage, I'll have the government pay for your food while I hide in the distance. No, in His 33 years on earth He called the lost, the lonely, the people that no one else wanted anything to do with. The woman at the well, the tax collectors, the thief on the cross next to Jesus as they died. He loved them, and it wasn't from a distance. He personally fed the hungry and He died to set us free.

Our adoption journey hasn't been easy, in fact the last year as we have brought home 2 more blessings (siblings to our current children) we feel as we have been under constant spiritual attack, and rightly so. We are bringing in 2 more eternal souls and raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Pardon me for putting it this way, but Satan is pissed and he will do anything to rob God of the glory that is due to Him, including trying to tear apart what God has brought together already in our family.

We are fighting through and know that God works all things together for good for those who belong to Him. The one thing that I know for sure is that the life we have chosen is a compassion builder, not just to those on the outside looking in, but in my children. I have children who constantly ask why we cannot adopt more or tell me when they grow up they are going to adopt a group of siblings as well. We are creating hearts that are strong, even though they have seen great pain. We are compassionate and we are walking with our children through their deepest darkest moments, one day at a time. It hurts and some days I wonder why I've allowed my heart to be stretched and broken in so many ways, and then I realized it is because I'm to be like Jesus.

Our family, we are world changers and I challenge you to be the same. Don't be content to be complacent. We are all called to James 1:27, even if we aren't called to adopt. "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land." Psalm 86:5-6. Shame on us if we as Christians allow any of the lonely to be handed over to Satan.

It's dirty, it's messy, it's painful, there are days that it's even bloody. My children may not have perfect parents, but they have per-

Megan is looking for her new family

Cheerful, patient, and curious, Marco, 11, wants to be a biologist when he grows up. He enjoys watching the Discovery Channel, studying science, and hunting for fossils. Recently, his younger biological sister joined an adoptive family. She and Marco don't get to see each other often, but they are often able to exchange letters and gifts through Saint Francis Community Services during the Christmas season. Marco loves his sister. And he's happy that she has found a "forever family" to adopt her and love her unconditionally. He's still waiting for his own family, though.

Marco is just one of the hundreds of children awaiting adoption in Kansas. He's also one of the children featured in Saint Francis Community Services' Fostering in Faith program. As a ministry, Saint Francis believes that one of the most powerful acts we can perform on behalf of children is to hold them in our prayers. In our own families, we pray for our children all the time - but sadly, many children have no family and no one to pray for them.

Fostering in Faith arose from that real-



ization. We know that most congregations and religious organizations have within their fellowship groups of people to whom God has given a spirit of intercessory prayer. Fostering in Faith ensures that children desperate for "forever families" are remembered and held in prayer by our faith commu-

nities.

Each month, Saint Francis sends participating congregations a photo and brief biography of a child who needs faithful, caring people to pray for him or her. The biography includes a prayer composed specifically for that child to help guide you in prayer. Congregations typically include the material in their Sunday bulletin or distribute it to their members so they can pray for the child at home if they wish.

Your prayers can transform the lives of these beloved children of God and bless the lives of the families who adopt them. To learn more, visit www.st-francis.org/fosteringinfaith.

To meet Saint Francis children in need of a permanent, loving family, visit www.st-francis.org/adoption.

manence and they have compassion modeled for them on a daily basis. Is it any different from the life that Jesus lead? No, and neither should the life of any believer be. Life wouldn't be so hard, if we didn't expect it to be so easy! So dear friend, find the mess that God has called you to, get dirty and jump in with both feet.

Jonathan and Allison Schumm of Topeka are vocal advocates for adoption, who strongly believe in the value of family and keeping families together. Their family has grown and changed so quickly over their 11 years of marriage that it is hard to believe. They have 17 beautiful blessings, including 2 sibling groups of 5, one of which has grown into 7, 4 biological children and 1 to be joining the family this month. The family hopes to finalize the adoption later this year of sibling number 7. The Schumm family is also active in Project Belong, a faith-based adoption advocacy organization that works in partnership with churches, families, and communities to "recruit, train, and support" adoptive families for Kansas children in

need. They also keep busy with Jonathan's jobs with Modern Woodmen of America and City Council and Allison's Norwex business, and training other families.

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A NEW APPROACH IN DEALING WITH RELATIONSHIP-BASED TRAUMA

by **Kathryn Peoples**

According to NationalAdoptionDay.org, there are approximately 100,000 children in the United States living in the uncertainty of foster care while waiting for an adoptive family. With an average wait of 4 years, more than 23,000 children are aging out of the system with no family or permanent home. Right here in Kansas, as of 8/31/2015 there were 6,464 children in foster care in an out of home placement and another 1,025 waiting for a forever family (www.dcf.ks.gov). That is a large number of children living in our towns that have relationship-based disturbances stemming from histories of abuse, neglect and/or trauma. And those hurts do not disappear overnight when adopted into caring loving families.

In spite of the fact that these children are adopted into families that have participated in 30 hours of state-mandated training, attachment problems, behavior problems, and social problems manifest in these children frequently. Often causing additional problems and trauma within the members of the adoptive family. Many times, these children are often labeled with numerous mental health diagnoses such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), reactive attachment disorder (RAD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as well as many others and then they are known as an alphabet soup rather than the precious child(ren) they truly are. And in all reality, we must remember the cause is the adverse childhood trauma.

Being aware and identifying the fact that our children have experienced trauma is by no means permission for the behavior. Quite the opposite is true. In fact, since we know that these children have been hurt relationally, we must help them heal in a relational manner as well. This is where Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross at Texas Christian University's Institute of Child Development have made such advances with the development of Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®). TBRI® is a parenting approach for all children but we are focused on children from hard places. It combines structure and nurture in a way that teaches respect and compli-



ance while also being loving and playful.

TBRI® provides parents, as well as other caregivers, teachers, and professionals ways to connect with, empower and correct the children. What makes this approach so effective is the fact that it addresses the past relational trauma that adopted kids have experienced while giving parents the skills needed to help their children heal. The skills developed during training utilize the most current brain and behavioral research.

Many times, when adoptive families reach out for help they are deep in crisis or sliding there quickly and want to manage behaviors quickly and swiftly. With TBRI® the main focus is really on three main principles: empowering, connecting, and correcting. Empowering principles focus on the physiological (internal/physical) and the ecological (eternal/environmental) needs of the child. Next, the connecting principles address the attachment and relational needs. Lastly, the correcting principles will bring about and teach self-regulation, boundaries, and healthy behaviors.

The first focus is empowering. A child must learn that they have a voice, and a voice that matters. When we are born into a safe, stable, loving family we learn this during the first year of life when we hear tens of thousands of "yeses" to our most basic needs being met. However, for the child from the hard place, we must recreate those developmental needs in current time through felt safety in safe, structured environments that provide sensory rich activities; proper nutrition with frequent snacks to maintain stable blood sugar levels; and adequate sleep and regular physical activity.

Connecting principles enable both child and parent (or caregiver) to experience personal and interpersonal activities and behaviors that build trust and secure attachments. Our same infant born into that safe, stable, loving family learned through the external

regulation of a mother that was attuned to the needs of the child from food, to diaper changes, to comfort. Now our caregiver must learn to be mindful of non-verbal cues so that adverse behaviors and basic survival instincts of fight, flight, freeze can be avoided long before a response happens. Playful engagement produces trust and warmth between children and their caregivers. Additionally, it takes about 400 repetitions to learn something new but only about 12 if you learn it while engaged in play. Who wouldn't want that short-cut!

Finally, are the correcting principles of TBRI®. As previously mentioned, many parents want to jump to these first, however, if we meet the basic needs of the child and are connecting, this often easily fall into place. These strategies are very proactive and really designed as preventative teaching done through practicing of life scripts such as: "use your words," "with respect," and "Oops, try again." During this time, caregivers should be mindful of using the IDEAL response; the acronym is a simple reminder for care givers to:

I—Respond immediately to the because research proves that learning is greatest when the response is in swift temporal proximity to the behavior.

D—Respond directly to the child through eye contact, giving them undivided attention, and bringing them nearer to you physically for teaching and guidance because research documents significant shifts in brain chemistry and activity during eye contact and proximity.

E—Respond in an efficient and measured manner. This is reflected in Levels of Response, in which caregivers use the least amount of firmness, corrective effort, and verbal directive that is required to correct

the behavior. This strategy also helps children gain trust, knowing adults will not overreact to their behaviors

A—The response is action-based. Redirect the child to practice an appropriate behavior alternative. Physically lead them through a real-life "re-do" when possible. Once the "re-do" is successful (because they used the appropriate alternative behavior), praise the child.

L—Level the response at the behavior, not at the child. Never reject the child as a person, only respond to the behavior.

It is vitally important to keep in mind that children with histories of complex developmental trauma have unique struggles and challenges for caregivers as they work to meet those needs. TBRI® is a relationship-based model that can be carried out by nurturing and insightful caregivers and implemented in nearly every environ-

ment. It is very holistic in nature, cost effective, and has huge potential for creating positive impact for children from hard places. The most difficult hurdle to overcome, is that of the caregivers need to learn the skills of mindfulness and self-reflection of our own emotional triggers and responses we have developed from our own childhood experiences, parenting and attachment styles. However, once that is done, you will hopefully be pleasantly surprised by the "ah-ha" moments and optimism that TBRI® brings.

Kathryn currently serves as a Ministry Liaison in NE Kansas for Project Belong. For more information about Trust-Based Relational Intervention® training or speaking engagements feel free to contact 127Consulting@att.net or Kat@projectBelong.org.

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Adopt Kansas Kids



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