



Tips for Staff

How to Use *Foster Care Youth United*:

-  To Train Teens (IL Programs)
-  To Train Adult Staff

STRUGGLING FOR CONTROL (Anger, Stealing, the Psychiatric Ward)

Introduction

Youth in foster care often have problems understanding and controlling their emotions and behavior. Many of them are full of rage at their parents and other adults who have failed them in the past. That rage sometimes erupts at the people who are closest to them (staff, boyfriends and girlfriends, foster parents)—even though those people may have done little or nothing to deserve the anger. Our first writer, Miguel Ayala, understands the connection between his earlier abuse and abandonment, and the anger he now feels. But, as he also admits, understanding his problem is not the same as solving it. He still struggles mightily with difficult and powerful emotions.

In the second story in this section, writer Lincoln Shann describes his “addiction” to stealing. He also describes how, after a long struggle, he is finding new ways to get attention and excitement, which can replace the feelings that made stealing so fun. One of the most important observations in his story is that it’s hard to stop a negative behavior, whether it’s anger, stealing, taking drugs, or whatever, unless you have some other way to meet your needs. After you “just say no,” you have to find something to say “yes” to.

If the final story in this section, the writer describes how his fighting got him locked up in psych wards for years and years. We publish only Part I of the story in this issue. You might ask your teens to speculate on how (or whether) this writer is going to change, and what will help him do so.

Following are questions for discussion which will help your teens reflect on the themes raised in the stories.

Abuse Made Him Angry

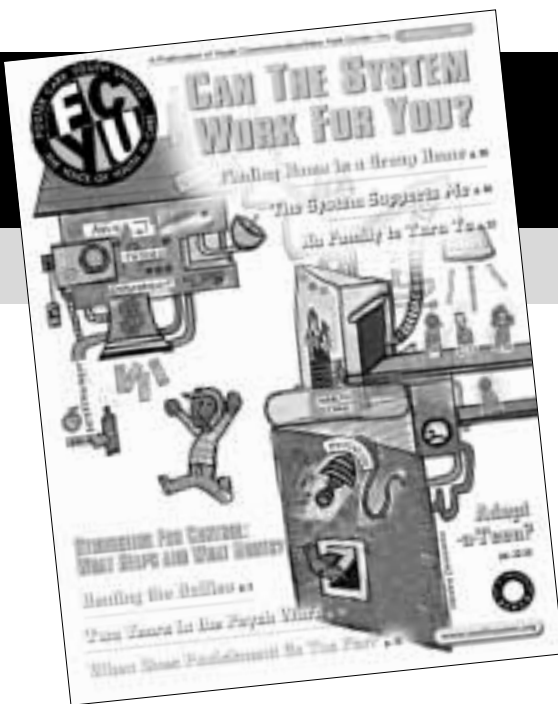
In “Beating the Bullies,” p. 2, Miguel Ayala describes his long struggle with anger. He grew up in a violent home where he was both emotionally and physically abused, and learned to take out his rage on others. Several programs have helped him improve, but he’s still struggling to get a firm grip on his emotions.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—In what ways did Miguel’s mother abuse him? What do you think was the worst thing she did?

—Sometimes Miguel’s mother was very mean, but other times she was very loving. How do you think her inconsistent behavior affected Miguel?

—Miguel never unleashed his anger on his mother. How did this affect him, and where did his anger go instead?



FIVE EASY STEPS

How to Use These Lessons to Run Workshop for Teens and Adults

1) Before the workshop, read the story to yourself and review the discussion questions and the activities to make sure they are suitable for your group. You may want to add or delete questions, change the activity based on your experience with the group, etc.

2) Introduce the story (briefly). Note that it’s a true story by a teen in foster care. Mention the topic. You can ask if anyone has had experience with this topic.

3) Read the story aloud. The facilitator can do the reading, but if possible go around the room and have each person read a paragraph or two. That increases involvement and, for teens, helps reinforce their reading skills.

4) Ask the discussion questions. Remember: some questions are factual, and you want to get the facts of the story straight. However, many questions end with “why or why not?” These are open-ended questions. Try to be as nonjudgmental as possible with these questions. Encourage a range of opinions. If someone says something ridiculous, more often than not someone else in the group will challenge them. You generally don’t need to, except to maintain a safe and respectful atmosphere in the room.

5) Conduct the activity. (Note: If the activity is a role play, have the participants respond to the role play when it’s over. They should be critical viewers, not passive listeners.)

When you’re done take a minute to review the discussion, highlighting the most positive and thoughtful comments that were made.

Remember, you can use these stories in IL classes with teens to help them explore constructive solutions to the problems they face, or you can use them to help group home staff, social workers, law guardians, or foster parents to better understand the teens they work with.



John Gaston

—Miguel thinks he might have been better had he gone into foster care earlier and escaped the abuse in his house. Do you feel the same way about your situation? Why or why not?

—Miguel doesn't tell his therapist all his secrets because he's afraid of going into foster care. Have you ever held back the truth in talking to adults, because you were afraid of the consequences? Were you ever able to open up? Why or why not?

—Miguel still gets angry and doesn't know what will help him control his emotions. What do you think Miguel needs in his life, to get in better control of his anger?

—What are examples of healthy ways for parents to express anger (and for children to express anger)?

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of designing a program that will help Miguel control his anger. The program can include individual therapy, family counseling, a peer support group, a mentoring program, or anything else the groups can think of. The groups should go into detail about how the therapy or counseling will work. Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

Getting With the Program

Miguel Ayala, in "Temper Tamers" (p. 5), looks at the various kinds of school, hospital, and community programs that have helped him try to control his anger. What's worked best are places that allowed him freedom and the ability to build authentic relationships with staff.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Miguel couldn't tell his therapist the truth about his abusive mother, because he didn't want to tell his problems to an outsider. Did you have a similar experience in therapy? Were you eventually able to tell the therapist the truth? Why or why not?

—When Miguel stops going to therapy, he

wishes the counselor had kept calling his house to ask where he was. That way, he says, he would have realized someone cared about him. Was there a time you wished an adult put in more effort to help you? What could that person have done, and how would it have affected you?

—Miguel likes one program he's in, because he's allowed freedom to leave school to buy lunch or to smoke. Because he feels trusted, he's happier. Do you wish you had more freedom in your foster home or group home? Why? How would it affect your behavior?

—Miguel is helped most when he's able to form "real relationships" with the staff, "based on trust and honesty, where there were no phony smiles." How do you define a "real relationship"? Have you been able to form them with adults? With other teens? If so, what enabled you to have these relationships? If not, what prevented you?

—Miguel says that in order for him to get better while still living with his mother, "she would have had to get better too." Could anything have been done to help Miguel's mother get better, while he was still living at home? Or should he have been removed sooner from his home?

Addicted to Stealing

Lincoln Shann, in "Stop Thief!" (p. 7), becomes addicted to stealing as a way to get attention and respect from his peers. He goes into the system, and being a thief eventually

loses its thrill as he finds more positive things to focus on.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Lincoln steals because he likes the feeling of excitement he gets from it. He also likes the respect and attention he gets from friends. Did you ever steal? If so, did you do it for the same reasons as Lincoln, or for different reasons? If not, have you ever turned to a negative behavior to get attention or excitement? What was it? Were you able to give it up? Why or why not?

—Lincoln is in a peer support group that helps him, because the other kids get on his back about stealing. Has a similar group ever helped you with a problem? In what ways? If not, could you see such a group helping you? How?

—Gradually, stealing loses its thrill for Lincoln and becomes boring. Now he tries to get attention in more positive ways. Did you ever go through similar change in your life? How?

Stuck in a Psychiatric Ward (Part I)

In "Treated Like an Animal," p. 10, the anonymous writer describes how his drug abuse and wild behavior landed him in Bellevue Hospital. The place feels like a jail, the staff are sometimes abusive, and the writer loses his temper quicker than before. (To be continued in the next issue of *FCYU*.)

Three Ways Your Teens Can Get Published

1) Writing contest: See p. 37. We offer \$175 in prizes. This month's topic:

"How Has Being in Foster Care Affected Your Education?"

Ask the young people to be specific and to explain their reasons. You may want to discuss the topic with your group before they begin writing. For example, some young people may have moved from home to home and had to change schools several times. Others may be attending schools on an agency campus. Some kids may have felt they had to hide the fact that they were in care from peers at school. Some kids may feel they got special help or tutoring because they were in care. Etc. The deadline for submissions is August 30.

2) Letters to the Editor: *FCYU* welcomes letters to the editor. Encourage youth to write to us about their reactions to the stories—the letters can be quite brief. Some of the lessons below can result in short letters to the magazine.

3) Poetry: See pps. 20-21. Encourage young people to send in their poems.

A note on the lessons:

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on issues raised by the stories in *FCYU*. These lessons can be used with foster youth in independent living meetings, counseling sessions, or in other group activities, as well as in individual work with your clients. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments.

A note on the group activities:

These activities are designed to have students work together in pairs or small groups. They can then share their work with the larger group.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—From the age of 7 through 13, the writer lives in residences where he has little freedom. How does that affect him?

—The writer goes into a group home at age 13 and has a lot of freedom. How does having too much freedom affect him?

—When the writer gets drunk or high, he's in a world "without pain, anger, hate, or problems." It's also the only time he can laugh. What does the writer do to give up his dependence on getting drunk or high?

—Have you ever had a similar relationship to drugs or alcohol? What eventually happened?

—How is the writer treated at Bellevue Hospital? Did you ever have a similar experience? What was it like?

—The writer sees a therapist but it isn't much help, because the therapist "never talked about my past. He didn't ask me about it, and I didn't bring it up." Do you sometimes wish people knew more about your past or asked you more about it? Why or why not?

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. In some residences, the writer had too little freedom and became angry. In other residences, he had too much freedom and got into bad behavior. Tell your groups they are in charge of a residence for youth who have had behavior problems. They have to come up with guidelines for going to school, working, keeping curfew, proper behavior, etc., that will strike the right balance between too little freedom and too much freedom. Go around the room, list the suggestions, and discuss.

An Angry Son Comes Home

Carmen Lydia Caban, in "Paying for the

Past," p. 15, regains custody of her 15-year-old son after losing him to foster care eight years earlier due to drug abuse. But the son is angry after all those years in care, and the two struggle to readjust and establish a stable relationship.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Carmen's son is angry at her for letting him down—her drug abuse caused him to grow up in foster care. What kinds of feelings do you have toward your biological parents? Do you ever think you'll be able to resolve them someday? Why or why not?



—Carmen said her son "didn't know what to do with all those feelings." If you were the family's social worker, how would you have helped Carmen's son express his feelings in a more positive way?

—What do you think of Carmen's decision to return her son to foster care? If you were in her shoes, what would you have done? Why?

—What would have to happen for Carmen and her son to establish a healthier relationship, with less anger and conflict? How would the son have to change? How would Carmen have to change?

—If you were Carmen's son, what would have to happen in order for you to forgive your mother?

How to Manage Anger

In "How to Chill Out," p. 14, therapist Toni Heineman gives advice on how to recognize an anger problem, and ways to calm down and stay in control.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—According to the therapist interviewed, one sign of an anger problem is if small things get you very mad (or if big things don't get you mad). Do you find yourself getting mad at small things? Why do you think you get so mad? Or do you find yourself not getting angry when you should be? What do you think keeps you from getting angry?

—What kinds of things get you angry? Do you notice a pattern to your anger? Do you think your anger is often about something else, rather than the thing you're getting angry about?

—How did your parents express anger in your home? How did that affect the way you express your anger now?

—Have you ever gotten to a point where you realized you needed to control your anger? What happened? How did you change?

—When you're little, you learn certain habits from your parents. What habits about expressing anger do you want to change? What habits do you want to keep?

CAN THE SYSTEM WORK FOR YOU?**Introduction**

In the following stories, young people describe how the foster care system worked to their benefit, saving them from unsafe homes. These writers have all moved past the point of "blaming" foster care for their problems. They recognize that (however imperfect it may be) the system actually offers them many resources which they can use to feel better and take charge of their lives. These stories can all be stepping off points for discussions with your teens about the resources available to them at your agency, many of which they may not be taking full advantage of.

**A Group Home Made Her Feel Safe**

In "Safety in Numbers," p. 26, Ja'Nelle Earle explains how she found caring people and encouragement in group homes and residential treatment centers. Unlike many other teens, she never got the attention or support she needed in foster homes or from her biological family.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Emotional and sexual abuse by her family made Ja'Nelle feel like she was "never

good enough for anything. I felt like the odd ball." Did you feel the "odd ball" in your family? In what ways? Did you ever think it was your family that was odd and not you?

—Ja'Nelle finds more caring and encouragement in group homes than in foster homes or with her biological family. Have you had a similar experience? Why or why not?

—Ja'Nelle has a good relationship with a staff member named Yolanda. Yolanda listens to Ja'Nelle and believes what she says. Have you ever had a similar relationship with a staff member? What was it about the person that made you feel close?

—One reason Ja'Nelle feels comfortable in group homes is because the other kids have all gone through the same things. Does being around kids who've gone through the same things make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable (or both)? In what ways?

—For Ja'Nelle, "A family meant trying too hard to fit in and be accepted." How would you summarize your feelings about family? Do you have feelings that are similar to Ja'Nelle's? Why or why not?

Working at Age 5

In "Little Man's Burden", p. 30, Joseph Johnson starts a newspaper route at age 5 to help support his impoverished family. When he goes into foster care he's relieved of his burden, but misses his family.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Did you ever have to work at a young age like Joseph, to support your family? What was the experience like?

—Why does Joseph feel so hopeless? Why does he try to commit suicide?

—Although foster care has helped him, Joseph still misses his family. He writes, "When I lived with them, everything was bad, but at least we were suffering together." If you were Joseph, would you rather be in foster care, or back with your family? Why?

—Joseph thinks that if the foster care agency had simply given his mother money, he might have been able to continue to live with her. Do you agree? Why or why not?



The System Has Her Back

In "Saved by the System," p. 32, Tara

Thomas has a different experience than many youth in care. The system helped her get back on her feet when she had no other family to turn to.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—When Tara goes into the diagnostic center, how is it different than living with her family?

—What kinds of support does Tara get from the foster care system? What is the most important thing, in your opinion, that the foster care system does for her?

—In what ways is your family and foster care experience similar to Tara's? In what ways is it different?

SHOULD I BE ADOPTED?

Intro: In the following articles, Natalie Kozakiewicz explains why she preferred to remain in foster care, although many people were urging her to be adopted. She also thinks agencies need to go about getting teens adopted in a different ways from younger kids.

What Family Is Best for Me?

In "Could I Be Another Mother's Daughter?", p. 22, Natalie Kozakiewicz is offered the chance to be adopted out of foster care by a family in upstate New York. She turns down the offer—and other offers by friends who want to adopt her—because she prefers the freedom of foster care, where she can be herself and not what others expect her to be.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Were you ever adopted (or in a position to be adopted)? What happened?

—Why is Natalie uncertain about being adopted? Why does she eventually decide against it?

—If you were in Natalie's shoes, what would your decision have been? Why?

—Natalie says that if she had "to choose to live with someone rich or live in the ghetto with my mother, I would definitely choose my mother." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Natalie worried that if she was adopted, she would have to pick that family's way of living and lose her own identity. Do you think Natalie's fears were realistic? Could she have been adopted, and still kept her own views about religion, fashion, etc.? Why or why not?

—Natalie feels that she can never be fully part of a family again because her mother loved her for who she was, and she can't expect that from other people. Do you have similar feelings about belonging to a family? Why or why not?

Shaun Shishido



Getting More Teens Adopted

In a second article, "Adopt-a-Teen?" (p. 25), Natalie gives advice to agencies on helping teens think about adoption.

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of increasing the number of teens adopted out of foster care. The groups should come up with a plan for recruiting adoptive families and preparing teens for adoption. They also need to take into consideration that many adoptive families want younger kids, and that many teens don't want to be adopted. Go around the room, list the recommendations on the board, and discuss.

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www.youthcomm.org



Tips for Staff is written for the bulk subscribers to *Fostere Care Youth United* to help them use the magazine more effectively with teens in their classes and programs.

For more information, contact:

Youth Communication
224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl.,
New York, NY 10001
212-279-0708 ext.100

Al Desetta, writer