



Tips for Staff

How to Use *Foster Care Youth United*:

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

HOW TO USE THIS MONTH'S STORIES WITH TEENS AND STAFF

AIDS, Sex, and The System

These stories focus on unsafe sex-potentially one of the deadliest activities that teens can engage in. One writer tests HIV positive. Another gets pregnant. Another is determined to remain a virgin.

The Country In Crisis

Teens write about 9/11, including two who lost family members. An Arab girl describes her anger at stereotyping. And one teen notes that for him, losing family and other difficult times are routine, and wonders if he'll ever get help.

Mixed Feelings About Biological Parents

Our writers met with a group of biological parents. There was anger, tears, and a lot of mixed feelings. These stories will help teens and staff better understand the powerful feelings that foster teens have toward their biological parents-and better understand the parents themselves.

Holiday Blues

Foster teens feel these more strongly than anyone, but often don't admit it-even to themselves. One result: acting out behavior. Reading this story will help teens identify their feelings and get more control over them. Staff will better understand what teen behavior.

Dads

All too often, fathers are MIA for foster teens. This story will help teens think about the kind of fathers they want to be.



Foster Care Youth United can help teens learn to deal constructively and pro-actively with the most important issues they face. It is also designed to be used to train staff, administrators, foster parents, and other adults who work with foster teens.

WHAT'S IN THE LESSONS

The lessons in this "Tips for Staff" newsletter has includes story summaries, discussion questions, and activities that you can use with teens or adults (you may have to change the wording slightly depending on your audience, but you'll see that most questions are designed to work with any foster care audience, teen or adult).

While the teaching suggestions vary from story to story, most include factual questions (which help get all the participants on the same page as they begin to discuss the story), and open-ended questions which encourage the reader to put him or herself in the writer's shoes, or to imagine taking a constructive action based on what they read in the story. There are no right answers to the open-ended questions. They are designed to spur discussion and reflection.

In general, you can read a story, have a discussion, and conduct an activity in one 45-minute session. Some stories can take longer, especially if you have a large group, want to have more discussion, or want to have several activities. But 45 minutes is enough time for a basic lesson. Here's how we usually conduct a lesson (we use the same methods with teens that we use when training adults):

Five **easy steps** for running a **workshop** using these lessons and the stories in **FCYU**—see next page

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 don't need to.

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.

In This Issue:

AIDS, SEX, AND THE SYSTEM

Intro: In the following articles, FCYU looks at how irresponsible sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases affect youth in care. Studies have shown that foster youth are more sexually active than other teens and use protection less frequently. The following articles look at why that happens and the risks involved.

Testing Positive

In "Date with Destiny," p. 2, the anonymous author describes his shock and fear at testing positive for HIV. He confronts many complicated feelings, including anger that his lover lied about not having HIV. The anonymous author gradually comes to terms with the ways HIV has changed his life.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—One reason that the anonymous author became HIV positive was that he gave into his partner's request to have unprotected sex. What do you think of the anonymous author's decision? After reading this article, has your attitude changed toward unprotected sex? If so, how? If not, why not?

—After the anonymous author thinks about his situation for a while, he calms down. What helps him calm down?

—The anonymous author decides against taking revenge against his lover. What reason does he give? If you were in his shoes, would you have made the same choice? Why or why not?

—What does the anonymous author learn from his therapist, that helps him with his illness?

—What strengths does the anonymous author gain from dealing with HIV?

Three Ways Your Teens Can Get Published

1) Writing contest: See p. 39. We offer \$175 in prizes. This month's topic:

Do You Think It's Important For Children to be Placed With Foster Families Who Are the Same Race or Culture as They Are? Why or Why Not?

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. The deadline for submissions is **December 31**.

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. 22-23. Encourage young people to send in their poems.

A note on the roleplays

You will need two or three participants to act out the suggested Roleplays. Make sure the “actors” understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each Roleplay participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view. Let the Roleplay go on for about five minutes. Then have the group discuss what they’ve seen and relate it back to the story.

A note on the group exercises

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

—When the anonymous author finds out he’s HIV positive, he feels as if his life has stopped. But, over time, he realizes his life will go on and he has a lot to be thankful for. Was there ever a time when you thought you had reached an end—a point where you felt life couldn’t go on—but then realized it would? What was the experience? What changed your attitude toward it? How did the experience change your life?

The Hazards Of Unsafe Sex

An anonymous author, in “Your Life, Your Choice” (p. 7), looks at the risks of irresponsible sex and the importance of making the right choice. On the same page, Ijeoma Okolo describes how she continued to have unprotected sex despite the risk and ended up pregnant

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Why is it so hard for teens to have protected, responsible sex?

—Ijeoma was sexually abused as a child, which she says caused her to have unprotected sex and become pregnant. What kinds of help might Ijeoma have gotten in the foster care system, that might have prevented this from happening?

—Has Ijeoma’s experience made you view sex in a different way? How?

Roleplay

Two teens, playing Ijeoma and a friend. The friend is having unprotected sex with a lot of men, because she says she feels loved that way. Ijeoma, based on her experience, thinks she should change her behavior.

Losing Mom to AIDS

Gloria Williams, in “A Bullet Hole In My Soul,” p. 8, is just 6 or 7 years old when she finds out her mother has HIV. Nine years pass before her mother dies from AIDS, and during that time Gloria experiences a wide range of emotions: denial, fear, anger, and acceptance. Although she has healed in some ways, she still licks her wounds.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—The first time the writer visits her mother in the hospital, she says she felt “sweet and sour that day.” What does she mean by this?

—How does the writer react when her sister tells her their mother won’t be getting better?

—The writer says she never fully accepted that her mother was going to die. How does the writer explain why she felt that way? Why does the writer say she had a “short term memory”?

—When the writer’s mother dies, she says “all those years of coping crashed into reality.” What does the writer mean by this? How did she react when reality came crashing down?

—The writer says, in order to be happy after her mother’s death, that she looks away “from some part of reality that I know is there.” What part of reality does she look away from? Is it healthy for the writer to do this? Why or why not?

—The writer says she goes through a cycle of “breaking down and then dealing with it” after her mother’s death. What feelings did you go through after the death of friend or family member? Were there particular “stages” to your grief or a “cycle” you were aware of? What were they? What emotion stands out the most? How have your feelings changed over time?

—The writer says her pain will never go away completely. Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

Unsafe Sex in the System

At Gloria Williams’ residential treatment center, all the residents seem to be having sex: the girls are pressured by the boys to give in, and the boys are pressured by their friends to get some (“Russian Roulette on Campus,” p. 12). And the worst part is that most of the kids don’t use protection. In a sidebar on p. 13 (“The DL on STDs”), the anonymous author describes the symptoms and consequences of the major sexually transmitted diseases.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Gloria is disturbed by what she sees around her at her residential treatment center:



kids having sex before they’re ready, and unprotected sex at that. How do you feel about your peers’ attitudes and behavior when it comes to sex? Are you disturbed by what you see around you? If so, why? If not, why not?

—Gloria is a virgin and decides not to have sex until she is ready for the responsibility and consequences. What do you think of her decision?

—Gloria says that foster youth may be more sexually active than the average teen and less likely to use protection for two reasons: many foster youth have been sexually abused and they are looking for the love they didn’t get when they were young. Do you think foster youth engage in more risky sexual behavior than the average teen? If so, do you agree with Gloria’s reasons? If not, why do you think foster youth have that reputation?

—Why don’t teens use protection when having sex? What would get them to use it?

Writing Activity

Ask participants to list the differences between a “good” sexual experience and a “bad” one. Tell them they’re not to write about the sex itself, but rather about the circumstances (e.g., do the people like and trust each other? do they use protection, are they old enough to be responsible, etc.).

Group Activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of sex education at their agency. Each group must come up with three specific recommendations

about what they would like to see in a good sex education program. They also have to briefly justify each of their choices. (For example: "A good sex education program would have teens do Role Plays about saying no.")

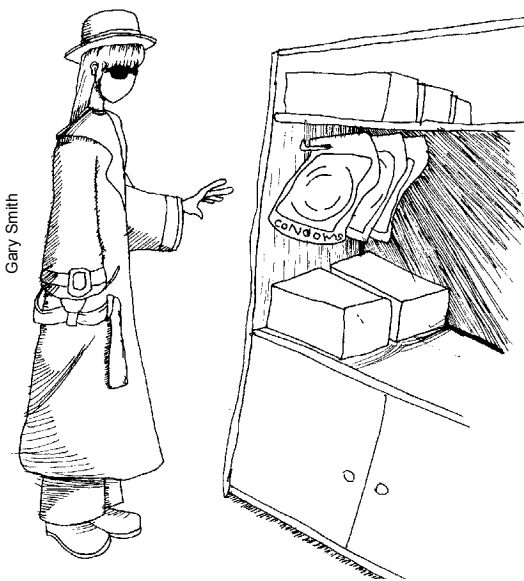
Each group presents their three recommendations and the entire group discusses them. (Optional: pass these along to staff responsible for sex education at your agency, or discuss them at a staff meeting.)

Roleplay

Two teens, playing Gloria and a friend. The friend has unprotected sex, isn't worried, and can't believe Gloria is still a virgin. Gloria explains why she views sex differently than her friend.

Girls and Condoms

In "The Condom Conundrum," p. 14, Racheal Jarrell explains why many young women are too embarrassed to buy contracep-



tives: they are taught to be passive and to hide their sexuality, which makes it harder for them to insist on safe sex.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Racheal says that her family favors men, and that women are seen as weak and passive. How were women viewed or treated in your family? How did this affect your view of women, or the way you see yourself as a woman?

—Racheal believes that if women are taught to be passive and hide their sexuality, they may not be strong enough to insist on safe sex or could be too embarrassed to buy condoms. Do you agree?

—If people are more open about sex—are encouraged to discuss it and learn about it—do you think they will be more inclined to practice safe sex? Why or why not?

—Are you embarrassed about buying contraception? If so, what would make you less embarrassed? If not, why not?

—Do you feel there is enough information available to teens about responsible sexuality? Why or why not?

—Do you agree with Racheal, that there is a "double standard" that keeps drugstores from selling contraceptives for women? What other ways can you think of where men and women are treated differently about sex. (For example: girls who are sexually active may be called "hos" while boys are called "players.")

THE COUNTRY IN CRISIS

Intro

In the following essays and poetry, foster youth explore their feelings about the attack on the World Trade Center, in response to the Writing Contest in the previous issue. Two of the writers lost relatives in the disaster.

Why It Happened and What Should Happen Now: No Easy Answers

After reading the responses to the World Trade Center attack on pps. 16-19, turn to the following exercises with your group.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—In the weeks since Sept. 11, how have your feelings changed about the terrorist attacks? Do you feel the same emotions you felt then? Why or why not?

—Do you feel more or less safe than you did before the attacks? Why?

—Has your opinion about joining the armed forces changed since the attacks? Why or why not?

—Lots of money has been raised to help survivors of the attacks and the families of victims. Did you contribute? How do you feel about the outpouring of support for the victims and their families?

—Many of our writers questioned whether the government should retaliate by attacking Afghanistan. What do you know about the U.S. response to the attacks? What do you agree with? Why do you disagree with? Why?

Why Wait for a Disaster to Happen?

In "Why Does It Take a Catastrophe?", p. 19, Antwaun Garcia explains why he doesn't have much of a reaction to the destruction of the World Trade Center: as a youth in care, he's experienced plenty of violence and poverty. He wonders why it takes a terrorist attack for people to come together and help each other.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Antwaun says he has experienced too much violence and other negativity in his life to care too much about what happened on Sept. 11. Do you agree with his position? Do you think foster youth and other people who have experienced difficult times will have less of a reaction to disasters like the World Trade Center than other people? Why or why not?

—Antwaun is glad people came together after the terrorist attacks, but he wonders why people can't come together to "help our communities, help our people, [and] provide more for our schools that suffer daily." Do you agree with Antwaun? Do people come together only after a disaster like the World Trade Center, and not for the everyday problems? If so, why do you think that happens?

—Antwaun compares the discrimination being directed against Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. to the discrimination directed against Blacks and Hispanics in this country. Do you think that is a valid comparison? Why or why not?

An Arab-American Youth Speaks Out

As an Arab-American, Rana Sino in "Why Not Shoot Me Now?," p. 20, is outraged by the anger she sees directed at Arabs and Muslims after Sept. 11. She is proud of being an American and also of her Middle Eastern heritage, and wishes the anger would be directed at those responsible for the attacks and not at innocent people.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Rana, as an Arab-American, is angry when she hears her classmates insulting and attacking all Arabs because of what happened on Sept. 11. Have you ever been in a similar situation, where you were attacked or blamed because of the actions of a group you belonged to? For example, as a teen, you may have heard people putting down all teenagers. Or you may have heard people putting down your racial or ethnic group. How did you feel? Did you speak up, like Rana? If so, how did it feel to speak up? If not, why did you remain silent?

—Rana is proud of her Arab heritage, and

also proud to be an American. Do you feel you belong to more than one culture or country? Are you equally proud of both? What do you like best about each?

Group Activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. The groups are in charge of coming up with recommendations for preventing harassment and violence against American Arabs and Muslims. Go around the room, list the recommendations on the board, and discuss.

FACING THE FAMILY

Intro

In the following articles, *FCYU* writers examine their conflicted feelings of love, anger, blame and sympathy for their biological families. They ask questions that are on the minds of most kids in care: "How much should I blame my family for the hurt they've caused me? How much should I forgive?"

Truth or Consequences

The anonymous writer in "Lying for Mom," p. 24, is caught in a bind: if she tells the truth about her mother—that she doesn't have a job or food in the house—the agency will keep her children in care. If she lies, the children will go home to neglect.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—The writer feels her mother isn't doing what she needs to do to get her children back from foster care. Do you feel your biological parent(s) is doing what she needs to do to get you back from foster care? Why or why not?

—The writer is caught in a bind: if she tells the truth about her mother not having a job or food in the house, her sister will stay in foster care. But if she continues to lie, her sister may go home to a mother who can't take care of her. If you were in the writer's shoes, would you continue to lie for your mother? Why or why not?

—Is it better for a child to say in foster care, even if she is unhappy, or to go home to a parent who may not be able to create a stable home?

Group Activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. After reading the article, the groups have to decide whether the writer's sister says



in foster care, or goes home to her mother. Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

Roleplay

Two teens, playing the writer and her younger sister. The sister wants to go home, even if her mother has no job and there's no food in the house. The writer wants her sister to stay in foster care.

Foster Teens Meet With Biological Parents

The article on p. 27 describes the complicated emotions experienced by *FCYU* writers when they meet with a group of biological parents who have children in foster care. Then, on the next page, Antwaun Garcia, in "Are Our Parents the Victims, Too?," writes about leaving the meeting more confused than ever: are the parents victims of tough circumstances, or are they just complainers who can't own up to their flaws?

Also have your group read the various short accounts by biological parents on pps. 29-33.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Do you blame someone or something for being in foster care? If so, why? If not, what prevents you from blaming?

—When a parent can't hold a

job, pay the rent, or develops a drug addiction, is it always just the parent's fault? Or are there other things to blame for these situations? How can you tell the difference between a parent who's the victim of tough circumstances, and a parent who won't take responsibility for her actions?

—After reading the various stories by parents (pps. 29-33), do you think their kids are in foster care because of tough circumstances in the lives? Or do you think they're complainers who blame the foster care system because they can't get their lives straight?

—In your opinion, do most kids belong in foster care? Or could more have been done to keep them out of care? Why?

Roleplay

Two teens. Teen #1 thinks the foster care system "snatched" her from her family and she should be back at home. Teen #2 thinks she's better off in foster care because her parents don't know how to be parents.

Learning to Forgive

Rita Naranjo, in "Forgiving Doesn't Have To Mean Forgetting," p. 30, describes how her feelings about her mother have shifted: she once blamed her mother for putting her in foster care, but now Rita sees her as a victim of a foster care system that doesn't give her the support and understanding she needs.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Rita has a lot of anger toward her mother for not staying off drugs. But she also



understands that her mother had a very hard life, which caused her to use drugs. Do you go back and forth between anger and understanding when it comes to your biological parents? Which emotion—anger or understanding—do you feel the most? Which emotion would you like to feel more of? Is it important to feel both anger and understanding? Why or why not?

—At one point, Rita concludes that her mother doesn't love her because "in some ways, that felt better than always hoping that everything would work out fine, and then being disappointed when it didn't." In other words, feeling abandoned by her mother, Rita protects her feelings. How do you protect yourself from the feeling of being let down by your parents? Is it always good to protect your feelings? Why or why not?

—What makes Rita think that the foster care system is mistreating her mother and even helping her to fail? Do you have similar feelings about how the foster care system treats your biological parent(s)? Why or why not?

—Over time, Rita begins to understand her mother's addiction to drugs, which makes it easier for her to forgive and move on. Have you, over time, been better able to understand the behavior of your biological parent(s)? Why or why not?

—Understanding her mother doesn't take away Rita's hurt about being in foster care. Why might make her hurt go away someday?

—Rita doesn't think the foster care system sees her mother's side of the story. Do you agree? What is it that the system doesn't see?

Group Activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Each group has to come up with two recommendations for how the foster care system could be more supportive of biological parents so that families have a better change of staying together. (This might giving parents help, like drug treatment, or better housing, so their kids don't have to go into foster care, as well as giving support if their kids do go into the system.) Go around the room, list the recommendations on the board, and discuss.

The Holidays and Foster Youth

In "Jingle Bell Blues" by Jesmenda Padilla, p. 34, the author interviews a psychiatrist about the strong, sometimes overwhelming emotions that foster youth experience during the holidays.



James Faber

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Antwaun says his father is "cool as a friend but sucky when it comes to taking care of his kids." Was your father a good father? Why or why not? Would you like to raise your kids the same way he raised you? If so, why? If not, what would you do differently?

—As Antwaun says, a lot of teen fathers don't take responsibility for their kids. What could be done to try to prevent this problem?

—Ahlvoid had a lot of troubles and could easily have abandoned his kids. Why do you think he decided to be a good father?

—Write a short note to Ahlvoid, telling him what you think of the way he's handled his responsibilities as a father.

—Write a Father's Day card to your father, telling him what you think of the job he's done.

Roleplay

Two teens. Teen #1 just found out his girlfriend is pregnant and has no intention of sticking around and being a father. Teen #2 wants to convince him to stay and do the right thing.

Group Activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. The youth are in charge of designing a program for teen fathers that will help them to stick around and take responsibility for their children. The program can include anything, from parenting skills classes to job training. Go around the room, list the groups' suggestions on the board, and discuss.

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

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Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—How do you feel during the holidays? Do you look forward to them, or hope that they pass quickly? How do you try to make it a good time for you?

—Do you pretend you're happy during the holidays? If so, do you think there's a better way to express your feelings? If not, how do you express what you really feel?

—What do you like best about the holidays? What do you like the least?

—What's your favorite holiday meal? Do you make it yourself? Who do you share it with?

Group Activity

Make your own holiday. Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Have the groups come up with suggestions for how their agency can celebrate the holidays, to make it a better experience for foster youth. Go around the room, list the groups' decisions on the board, and discuss. Bring the suggestions to the appropriate staff at the agency.

Fathers

A lot of teen fathers abandon their babies, but in "Where the Fathers At?" by Antwaun Garcia, p. 35, the author profiles one young man who is taking responsibility for his two sons. And on p. 37, Jackie Knight in "Daddy Dearest" recalls the Father's Day card she wrote for her absent dad back in the fourth grade.