



Tips for Staff

How to Use *Foster Care Youth United*:

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



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.

This Issue's Theme: Finding Relationships With Family That Work

Introduction:

The holiday season can bring up a lot of difficult feelings about family, but especially for foster youth. In the following articles, *FCYU* writers look at how they are struggling to find ways to relate to their families. Being too close can sometimes bring more hurt. But so can being too distant. These stories may help readers to talk about and figure out what kinds of relationships they want with their own families.

Goodbye To All That

In "Letting Go," p. 2, the anonymous writer describes a turbulent relationship with his family. Numerous conflicts with his mother and sister land him in foster care at age 7. When he goes back to live with them, things are fine for a while, but then problems escalate and he decides he's better off moving out and cutting all ties.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why did the writer go into foster care at age 7? Do you think it was necessary for him to go into foster care? If so, why? If not, what might have been done to help the family get along and keep him at home?

—The writer begins to think that it's his fault he's in foster care. Why does he think that? Did you ever feel that way? Why?

—The writer says his mother saw who he "really was." What does he mean by that? Do you think his mother saw him for who he "really was"? How do you feel about the way the mother treated the writer?

—The writer can't decide if the problem is with him or his family. Have you ever felt that way? What did you eventually decide? What helped you to decide?

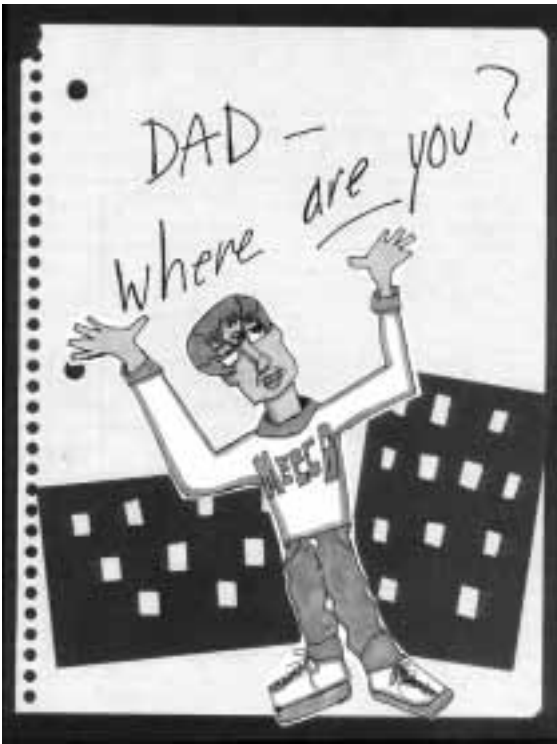
—When the writer goes home at age 14, he's hopeful about his family and the future. Why do you think he's hopeful, despite everything that has happened in the past?

—What do you think of the writer's decision to cut all ties with his family? If you were in his situation, would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?

—How is the writer's experience with his family similar to yours? How is it different?

An Absent Father

Antwaun Garcia, in "Tired of Missing Pops" (p. 6), writes about his pain at having an absentee father. Growing up, he was close with his dad, but his father has since disappeared from his life. He's tired of put-



how does it fail to show what foster care is really like?

Tough Times With Dad

Shannel Walker, in "What Happened to Daddy's Girl," p. 11, starts rebelling and acting wild as a young teen to get her difficult father's attention. He takes out a PINS petition on her, and she goes to live with her grandmother. When Shannel becomes pregnant, she thinks she's finally getting the attention she always wanted from her father, but then they start having the same conflicts as before.

Prompts for discussion And/or writing:

—When Shannel runs away to party and stay out all night, she says it was "mostly about forgetting how sad and angry I felt, and about getting attention from my father." Do you

ever act in a similar way to get attention from family or friends? Did you get the kind of attention you wanted?

—What do you think is the main cause of the tension between Shannel and her father?

—Shannel says that she and her father "once had such a good relationship, and I want us to make things like they were." Do you think she's being realistic about their relationship? Why or why not?

—If Shannel had had a better relationship with her father, do you think she would have become pregnant? Why or why not?

Rosa Perrin

ting his life on hold for a man who won't be a good parent.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—When Antwaun was younger, he was close to his dad. Were you close with your father? What kinds of things did you do together?

—Are you close to your father now? If so, what brings you close? If not, what has come in the way of being close?

—As he grows older, Antwaun realizes he's more like his father every day. How are you like your father? In what ways are you different?

—Antwaun says he would like to break the "bad streak" of how men behave in his family. In what ways do you want to be different from your family? What patterns or cycles do you want to break?

—Write a letter to your father, explaining how you feel about the kind of parent he's been.

Foster Care, the Movie

On p. 8, several *FCYU* writers discuss their reaction to the new film *White Oleander*, based on Janet Fitch's novel by the same name, which portrays a young woman's journey through the Los Angeles foster care system.

Group activity:

Take your group to see the movie, and have a discussion afterwards. Is it an accurate portrayal of foster care? In what ways? If not,

The Trouble With Sis

In "Misery Loves Company," p. 17, Joann-Marie has a difficult relationship with her sister, and feels betrayed when the sister leaves the foster home they share. The sister goes to live in a group home, tries to commit suicide, and gets raped while in a new foster home. Joann-Marie is torn between supporting her sister, and distancing herself from someone whose problems are too much to deal with.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Joann-Marie's sister has a lot of problems, and Joann-Marie gets tired of hearing about them. Do you have a family member or friend who seems like more trouble than she's worth? Are you able to be close to that person? Or, like Joann-Marie, do you feel the need for



Gary Smith

Three Ways Your Teens Can Get Published

1) Writing contest: See p. 14. We offer \$175 in prizes. This month's topic:

"If You Dated Yourself, What Would That Be Like?"

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 Jan 4th.

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. 26-27. 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. In some cases, where we think a question is particularly suited for writing, we indicate that. In addition, group activities and roleplays are suggested for more active learning.

A note on roleplays:

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested roleplays. Make sure the young people 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 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.



Karolina Zarniesienko

Dealing with Mom's Addiction

In "A Second Chance," p. 20, Karen Haynesworth finds out her mother's an addict when she's a young girl. At 9, Karen goes into foster care, gets treated badly by foster parents, but eventually lives with her cousin, Michelle, who becomes a loving foster parent.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—How do you feel about the way that Karen found out about her mother's drug addiction? Do you feel that was the right way for her to find out? Why or why not?

—Even though her mother doesn't see Karen for a long time, Karen has faith that her mother loves her. Why do you think Karen had that faith?

—How did Michelle discipline Karen when they lived together? What do you think of Michelle's methods?

—Michelle allows Karen to have a relationship with her biological mother, even though the mother lost parental rights. A lot of foster mothers would not have allowed Karen to have that kind of contact. What is your reaction to the way Michelle handled it?

—Why does Karen forgive her mother? Have you been able to do the same with someone in your life, who hurt you in that way? Why or why not?

Getting a Child Back

In "Losing Barbie", p. 21, Bertha Marquez describes how she lost her daughter Barbie to foster care because of her drug addiction.

Bertha goes to drug rehab and wins the right to have her daughter home for weekends.

Prompts for discussion And/or writing:

—Bertha thought she was a good mother even when she used drugs, because she gave Barbie everything she needed, like food, clothes, a home, and love. Is it possible for someone to use drugs and still be a good mother? Why or why not?

—Did you have a parent who had problems similar to Bertha's? What is your relationship like with that parent?

—Bertha says that the system is set up to make parents and children into enemies. Do you agree? Why or why not?

—Bertha is not rushing to have her daughter come home and live with her.

Why had she made that decision? Do you think it's the right one?

—What are the biggest challenges that Bertha and Barbie will face in rebuilding their relationship?

Reaching Out to Help Others

Introduction:

In the following stories, foster youth describe what they have done to help others: befriending an enemy, being a peer counselor, and encouraging a grieving son to talk about the father he lost.



Kenly Dillard



Shaun Shishido

distance?

—Joann-Marie feels torn about her sister: she's has a lot of problems, but she's also family. Think of a family member or friend who brings up similar feelings in you. Write a letter to that person, expressing how you feel about your relationship.

—If you were the writer, what kind of relationship would you have with the sister? Why?

Reaching Out to An Enemy

In "Girl, Stop Fronting!", p. 30, Chantel Clark describes how a girl named Kim was her arch-enemy in school. But then Chantel notices that Kim's life seems to be falling apart, and finds out they have more in common than she thought. She reaches out to Kim, and they become friends.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

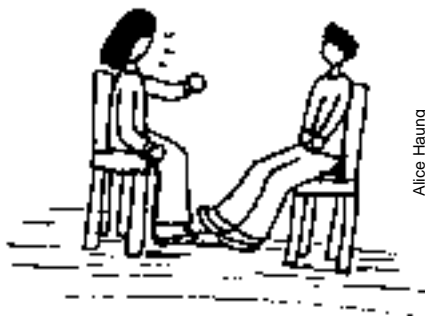
—Have you ever had a conflict with someone, like Chantel had with Kim? What caused it? What eventually happened between the two of you?

—Why do Chantel and Kim become enemies in the first place? Why is there tension between them?

—Chantel says that if you've suffered pain, you can tell if someone else is hurting inside. Do you agree with that? If so, have you ever befriended someone who you thought was in pain?

—Through their friendship, Chantel and Kim both realized that they could be themselves and not put up fronts. Did a friendship ever help you get more in touch with who you really are? How?

Lending a Hand



In "A Listening Ear," "Let's Talk About Sex...and STDs," and "Happy Camper", pps. 31-33, three youth in foster care describe how they have helped others: by supporting a grieving youth, by becoming a peer counselor, and by befriending a fellow camper.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—All three of these young people help other young people their age. Have you ever participated in a peer support group, or gone to the aid of another young person? What was the experience like?



—Why are teens more likely to respond to each other, rather than to an adult? How could adults change the way they interact with teens, to relate better?

—If you don't currently do so, how might you become involved in a volunteer activity to help others your age?

A Big Burden

In "A Mother to My Brother," p. 34, Mayra Sierra is only 15, but like a mother to her 9-year-old brother, who was sent to live in the U.S. by their mother, who stayed in Colombia. It's a lot of responsibility, and though Mayra has more opportunity here, she wishes they were both back with their family.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Mayra is separated from her brother for four years. Have you ever been separated from a sibling for a long time? How did it affect your relationship? What is your relationship like now?

—Mayra feels like a mother to her brother. Have you ever had to play that role to a sibling? What did you like about it? What did you dislike?

—Mayra wants to be a role model for her brother, but also can't be perfect all the time. Have you ever felt similar conflicts because a younger sibling looked up to you?

—Mayra says her head knows she's better in the U.S., but her heart wants to be back with her mother. What kinds of divided feelings do you have about your family?

Slipping Through the Cracks

Karen Haynesworth in "Missing Due to Inaction," p. 37, looks at how foster youth can

fall through the cracks: for three months, her social worker didn't know that she had left her foster home.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Karen's social worker loses contact with her for three months. Did a similar thing ever happen to you?

—What could prevent foster youth from "falling through the cracks"? What needs to be changed?

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. The youth are in charge of improving the foster care system. They have to come up with recommendations for making sure social workers don't allow foster youth to "fall through the cracks." Go around the room, list the suggestions 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.

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