Love to Nurture is a relationship-driven, grace-based, trauma-wise style of parenting that holds sacred the dignity of every child, the uniqueness of every child, the emotional safety of every child, and the developmental stage of every child.
Hope & Home is a life-giving community of families who have responded to the calling that God has placed on their hearts: the call to care for children who are in need of safe, nurturing homes. Matthew 9:36 says, “When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plenty, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’” If Jesus were talking about child welfare, He might have said, “The children are plenty, but the foster families are few.”

The calling you have felt to become foster parents is real, and it is urgent. Hope & Home has approximately 150 families with 180 children in our foster homes, but there are more children every single day that we aren’t able to place because we don’t have more openings.

From our two decades of experience, we believe that becoming a foster parent is one of the most significant, life-changing, impactful spiritual assignments you will ever have. Children are a blessing from the Lord, indeed, and we are called to care for them; however, the mission of foster care can often feel brutal: cases can be drawn out for years; children may not love you back the way you’d hoped; professionals may not recognize how exhausting it is to transport kids to all their visits and therapies; children may alter your lifestyle more than you ever imagined; you may not feel appreciated; the direction of a case may change from moving towards adoption to placement with a long lost relative.

The scenarios are endless, and some foster parents walk away discouraged and disillusioned when things get tough. This is where resilience comes in.

Any mentor at Hope & Home will agree: the mission of foster care can be joyous and fulfilling, but make no mistake, it is a marathon, not a sprint. If we are going to fulfill the mission God has assigned to us, we will need to develop the skill of resilience in order to recover quickly from difficulties and stay the course because “the harvest is plenty, but the workers are few.” As Paul said in Hebrews 12, “Let us put aside everything that takes us off course. Let us keep running with endurance the race that God has planned for us.”

**THE MISSION OF FOSTER CARE CAN BE JOYOUS AND FULFILLING, BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE, IT IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.**
WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is referred to as the ability to bounce back from adversity, or better yet, the ability to “bounce beyond” – to do more than simply survive adversity but to be transformed positively by it with a sense of regeneration and growth.

TRAITS OF RESILIENCE IN FOSTER PARENTS

- The ability to find meaning and purpose from adversity
- The ability to keep perspective and see the bigger picture
- The ability to see past the current adversity
- The knowing of when to persevere and when to let go
- The ability to be intentional about developing healthy coping skills
- The ability to feel empowered by being in control of yourself and your behavior
- The ability to accept that you cannot control “the system” (of child welfare)
- The ability to accept that you may not ever understand why something happened
- The wisdom of seeking counsel amidst uncertainty
WHAT IS MY PURPOSE IN DOING FOSTER CARE?

The great news is resilience is a skill that can be learned and practiced.

Developing resilience starts with:

1) Identifying your purpose as a foster parent.

Almost every letter of intent we receive from aspiring foster parents overwhelmingly conveys the noblest of intentions for wanting to become a foster parent: a strong sense of “being called,” “having a heart for children,” “caring for widows and orphans,” “giving children a safe home as long as they need it,” “growing our family by helping children in need,” “showing children what a loving family is like.”

Think back to your own letter of intent, or reason for wanting to become a foster parent. Think back to the promise you made to the “child I haven’t met yet.” Now that you’ve gone through training and certification, has your reason for doing foster care changed at all? If so, how? Ask yourself, “What is my purpose in doing foster care?” Write it down, revisit it when you need inspiration to stay the course, and be open to the idea that you may discover deeper meaning and purpose throughout your journey.

CAN I DEVELOP RESILIENCE?

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TWO FOSTER CARE SCENARIOS

Scenario 1:
Imagine that in the next year, you are faced with reuniting a sibling group who has been in your home for seven months with a relative whom you don’t view as “fit” to handle them and take care of them. You have grave concerns about them living there. The caseworker lets you know that they will be moving within the next week sometime, probably next weekend, but you get a hasty call from her on Tuesday saying that she’s picking the kids up from school and moving them to this relative a few days early. She asks that you have their stuff packed and ready for her and doesn’t even apologize for the short notice. What are you feeling?

Scenario 2:
Part A:
Imagine that in the next year, you fall in love with a precious baby boy and are assured by the caseworker that the case will move toward adoption. You’ve imagined what life with be like once he’s officially yours, you feel a sense of cautious excitement that he’s really going to be yours forever. Then you hear from the caseworker that she is waiting on a paternity test from a man who could be his father who didn’t even know the baby existed. What are you feeling?

Part B:
Imagine getting a call from the caseworker stating that the paternity test came back positive, and that this dad wants to meet his son and take him into his existing family. The caseworker, as compassionately as possible, shares the most dreaded outcome: that this will happen soon. How are you feeling?

2) Realistic expectations and a strategy to deal with disappointment.

Did you notice a theme in the three scenarios?

Expect that the “team” of professionals will make decisions about children’s futures that you don’t agree with. Expect it to hurt. Expect it to be hard not to take it personally. Expect that you may feel that you are not being heard. Expect that you may struggle not to feel angry that they aren’t considering “the best interests of the child.”

Then remind yourself that this is the nature of foster care. You are not the first foster parent to feel this. It is normal to feel disappointed when your expectations are not met. When our expectations are not met we tend to blame others. You are not the first foster parent who wants to walk away, blaming a “broken” system. You are not the first foster parent who wants to change the system, blaming it for hurting you. It’s important at these times to remember the big picture of foster care is that it’s temporary care so children can go back to their parents or relatives. When that’s not possible, then the county looks at adoption by a nonrelative. Expect that adoption is the exception, not the norm. Even though Hope & Home does about 40 adoptions per year this is out of several hundred kids that come through our doors.

Example:
A long-time former foster mom, Toni Smedley, wanted nothing more than to have a baby girl. She took tough teen girls, and she took in eight different infants, over the course of eight years, all of whom were in her home until their first birthdays, all of whom were reunified with their parents. Finally, on the 9th round, she adopted her dream baby girl, who is 13 years old this year. What would have happened had she become so disillusioned that she walked away after that third baby went home to bio mom? What if she had thrown in the towel after that fifth baby was reunified? No one would have blamed her.
Cognitive distortions, also known as “thinking errors,” are “trigger thoughts.” These thoughts are patterns of thinking that we unknowingly reinforce over time which have the power to damage both our self esteem and our relationships. Aaron Beck, a psychiatrist who, to this day, has held the position of Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania since 1954, established the basis for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which is the idea that the way we think impacts our feelings and behaviors. As the theory goes, if we challenge our thinking errors, we can change our behavior. Of course, we know that when it comes to the behaviors of traumatized children, it’s not that simple, because trauma is a physiological state, not merely a state of mind.

However, as parents, we can all reap the benefits of identifying our own cognitive distortions so we can respond to kids’ behaviors in ways that heal.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>COGNITIVE DISTORTION</th>
<th>WHAT IT MEANS</th>
<th>COMMON PARENTING TRIGGER THOUGHTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FILTERING</td>
<td>Focusing only on the negative aspects of a situation; being hyper critical</td>
<td>“I know she was helping with the dishes after dinner, but she didn’t listen to me when I told her to rinse the plate off before putting it in the dishwasher.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIND READING</td>
<td>Assigning malicious or manipulative motive to behavior</td>
<td>“He slammed the door because he knows it pushes my buttons.” “Of course, she apologized just to manipulate me into getting what she wanted.”</td>
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<td>BLACK OR WHITE THINKING</td>
<td>Extreme categorizing of things as good or bad without the ability to appreciate the nuances and complexities of gray areas</td>
<td>“The way she dresses is unacceptable.” “Slow obedience is no obedience.” “If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say it at all.”</td>
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<td>CATASTROPHIZING</td>
<td>Blowing situations out of proportion; imagining the worst-case scenario and behaving accordingly</td>
<td>“If you give them an inch, they’ll take a mile.” “If I give him a cookie before dinner, his appetite will be ruined, he’ll expect a cookie before every meal, and he’ll end up malnourished and ill, and I’ll be accused of neglect!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVERGENERALIZING</td>
<td>Using past experiences as a reference point for making sweeping assumptions about present or future circumstances</td>
<td>“I’ve tried ‘nurturing’ this child. It doesn’t work.” “My parents spanked me and I’m fine, so I can’t wait till this child is adopted so I can use some ‘real’ discipline.” “Traumatized kids just use their trauma as a crutch to get their way.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMOTIONAL REASONING</td>
<td>Interpreting reality based on feelings; treating feelings as fact; inability to see circumstances clearly due to emotional overwhelm</td>
<td>“I’m scared of the birth parents; therefore they are dangerous.” “That 2 yo boy hit me, which brought back scary memories of being abused; therefore this child is a perpetrator, and he needs to be out of my house.”</td>
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<td>FALLACY OF FAIRNESS</td>
<td>Believing life should be fair with resultant pouting when things don’t go as hoped</td>
<td>“After all I’ve done for this kid and he still doesn’t appreciate it.” “This child is clearly better off with me. How does the judge not see that, and why is he sending him back to that environment?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>LABELING</td>
<td>Attributing another’s actions to a character flaw rather than seeking to understand</td>
<td>“She’s lazy because she won’t fill out job applications.” “He refuses to do his chores because he is self-centered.” “He is acting like such a spoiled brat.” “I'm not bonding with this child. She must have RAD.”</td>
</tr>
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TAMING TRIGGER THOUGHTS

STRESS-REDUCING COPING THOUGHTS

• Kids are not little adults
• Kids are not going to behave like adults
• Kids are learning
• Kids do well when they can
• Let it go
• My job is to teach, not get revenge
• It’s okay for kids to get angry
• It’s okay for kids to express negative feelings
• Maybe he/she is tired or hungry
• Maybe something happened at school
• Show grace, I’m not perfect, either
• Let me think about it
• It’s not the end of the world
• Tomorrow is a new day
• Kids are impulsive
• Their brains aren’t developed like adult brains

• Kids learn skills over time, not overnight
• Kids don’t have the coping skills adults have
• Don’t take it personally; it’s not about me
• Don’t take it so seriously; have a sense of humor
• I can get through this without overreacting
• I can walk away for now and address this later when I’m calmer
• Let’s try a change of scenery
• This is not about me
• This is the only way he/she knows how to cope
• Kids act before thinking. It’s normal
• Maybe I’m the one who’s tired
• What do I need to do to chill out?
• He/She is doing the best he/she can

STRESS-REDUCING COPING SKILLS

Distraction Coping Skills:
• Deal with it later
• Take a bath
• Watch TV
• Check Facebook/Pinterest/social media
• Put on music
• Read a book for flip through a magazine
• Let the kids watch TV or play video games so you can chill
• Go on a drive
• Ride a bike
• Take a bath
• Take a nap
• Cuddle/play with your pet
• Watch funny pet videos online
• Tune into your favorite comedian
• Order take out

Relational Coping Skills:
• Call a friend, mentor or support group leader
• Talk to a therapist
• Connect with an old friend
• Schedule an outing with a friend
• Lean on your spouse
• Plan a fun date night

Physical Coping Skills:
• Learn a few basic yoga poses
• Go on a walk
• Do two minutes of intense aerobic exercise
• Schedule a massage
• Ride a bike
• Dance
• Put your feet up
• Take a few deep breaths

Interpersonal/Spiritual Coping Skills:
• Keep a gratitude board or journal
• Pray/read a devotional/draw on your favorite Scriptures/worship
• Use a feeling-word sheet to help identify your feelings
• Journal about your feelings
• Have a plan for when you feel triggered
• Simplify your schedule
• Give yourself a break
• Look at the big picture