WHAT CAN I DO? (CONTINUED)

Minimize change
Managing transitions and changes in plans can be difficult for youth who are a part of the child welfare system. Plan and prepare with the youth as much as possible and offer reassurance that change, such as taking on new duties, will be taken in gradual steps.

Be understanding
If communication or behavioral challenges arise, try not to take them personally. Think of ways you can use the incident to help the youth learn a different way of handling the situation the next time it arises.

Resources:
2. SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Solutions.
3. Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools. Education Law Center.

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Youth who are a part of the child welfare system have faced very difficult challenges, also known as traumatic events, in their lives. Some of those challenges may include: the death of a loved one; being removed from family and placed into foster care; being the victim of or witnessing family violence, abuse or neglect; or school violence.

It is important to have a basic understanding of what trauma is and how it can affect those who have experienced it; however it is much more important to understand, as a manager, that you have a unique opportunity to help youth in foster care build the confidence and skills necessary for young adults to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?
Trauma results from an event or set of circumstances experienced by an individual that is physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and well-being.2

Being trauma-informed in the workplace means being informed about and sensitive to trauma, in addition to providing a safe, respectful and trusting environment.3

WHAT CAN I DO?

*Celebrate accomplishments, large and small*

Be patient, provide extra reassurance and celebrate accomplishments to build confidence, and self-esteem.

Example: A youth has completed a day of cash register duty. Celebrate this accomplishment and point out things he or she did well (for example, handled a difficult customer well).

*Make corrections with care*

Be mindful of the approach used with youth who are under-performing or who have made a mistake.3

Example: A youth is struggling with making change and as a result his/her drawer is always off at the end of the shift. Use this as an opportunity to teach the youth rather than disciplining him/her.

*Lead by example*

By speaking to co-workers with respect, listening, and maintaining appropriate boundaries you can set a positive example for foster youth you are supervising.

*Check in and listen to the youth*

Genuinely asking how they are doing and listening make all the difference in the world. It lets the youth know that you and the business cares.3 Additionally, checking in provides opportunities for you to assign the youth to a job duty they like if they are having a challenging day.

Example: A youth is feeling very sad and down because his mother missed a visit with him. Offer to let him do something he enjoys for the day (such as operating the custard machine if that is a responsibility that he prefers).

*Step in when things get tough*

In/after difficult situations, offer the youth a break and provide the youth the opportunity to talk about it. Offer the youth the option to switch to a different task out of the public eye.

*Be mindful of language*

Be sensitive to the fact that many youth may not have traditional families, i.e. biological parents at home. Youth may be living with a relative or even with a non-related foster family. Shift language in the workplace from “parent” to “caregiver” or simply “family.”3