



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is CORE Teen?**

CORE Teen is a FREE curriculum for prospective and current foster, adoptive, kinship and guardianship parents who are or will be raising older children from foster care who have moderate to severe emotional and behavioral challenges. It was developed through a 3-year cooperative agreement with the Children’s Bureau. Spaulding for Children worked with several partners to create the curriculum: the ChildTrauma Academy; The Center for Adoption Support and Education; the North American Council on Adoptable Children; and the University of Washington. The curriculum was tested in four pilot sites over 18 months.

### **Why was CORE Teen created?**

Research has consistently shown the benefits of placing children and youth in families. Behaviors resulting from moderate to serious emotional health challenges and past trauma make it more likely teens will be placed in restrictive settings and age out of the child welfare system without achieving permanency. In an effort to keep youth with higher needs in families, the child welfare system needs to help resource parents develop specialized knowledge and skills. Effective trauma-informed and culturally responsive training will reduce the risk of placement disruptions and increase permanency options, while also helping recruit new resource parents.

Caregivers need multiple exposures to training about trauma to help them understand the reasons behind behaviors and be provided with skills and tools to effectively manage these behaviors.

This intermediate to advanced training, is designed for prospective families of older children who have gone through their preservice training and also for parents already raising older children with higher needs.

### **How was the content for the curriculum determined?**

Before creating the training, the partner team completed an extensive literature review (more than 200 publications), reviewed 20 evidence-based or evidence-informed curricula, conducted interviews and focus groups of more than 60 caregivers, people who had been in foster care, and professionals, and interviewed an additional 11 content experts to identify initial competencies and characteristics.

These activities resulted in the team identifying 199 competencies that might have been included in the curriculum. Recognizing no curriculum could fulfill 199 competencies, the group used a consensus-building process to prioritize and rank the 199 competencies and validate characteristics that needed to be included in the curriculum. This process reduced the competencies from 199 to 38 and confirmed 30 characteristics; identifying the framework for the curriculum's content.

### **What are the components of the curriculum?**

There are three components to the CORE Teen curriculum: self-assessment, classroom instruction and right time training.

#### **1. SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The self-assessment is a learning tool for families; allowing parents to rank themselves on key competencies and characteristics; identifying both their areas of strength and those that may pose challenges when parenting older youth.

The self-assessment takes about one hour to complete, and provides caregivers with immediate scores and identifying resources and activities they could use to enhance those areas where they are most challenged.

The self-assessment is designed to help participants determine if they have the characteristics that are effective in working with older youth with higher needs. It can help them assess their current capacity, household functioning, and need for ongoing training. It also may help families identify the likelihood of their becoming a permanent resource for a teen, and can help them explore realistic expectations and the impact of unrealistic expectations. In addition, the self-assessment provides a preview of the content to be covered in the classroom and right time training sessions, helping to pique families' interest.

During the pilot, parents completed the self-assessment three times. The first was prior to any exposure to curriculum content, the second immediately followed the completion of the classroom instruction, and the third occurred 90 days after completing the classroom training.

After families completed their initial self-assessment, trainers received a compiled, anonymous report, identifying the learning needs of the participants. This helped to prepare the trainer and identify those areas of the classroom content that may require some additional time or focus.

Improvement in scores for competencies and characteristics was noted throughout the pilot. The competencies in which participants had significant improvements included:

- Trauma-informed Parenting
- Continued Connections
- Relationship Developments Parental Regulation
- Parental Adaptation

- Parental Resilience
- Transitions
- Behavior Management
- Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression

The following characteristics were found to have statistically significant increases in scores after the training:

- Attunement, Appreciation, Compassion
- Committed
- Predictable
- Resilient
- Realistic
- Self-awareness/Self-regulation
- Sense of Humor

The findings demonstrated the curriculum is effective in providing gains in knowledge and attitudes around these competencies and characteristics.

Based on the feedback obtained from the pilot, families believed taking the self-assessment two times would be enough. They believed the self-assessment helped them to understand where their weaknesses and strengths were and the found value in seeing their scores change.

The pilot sites also identified additional ways in which they believed the self-assessment could be beneficial. It is noteworthy that some of the suggestions below could impact the confidentiality of the families' responses and influence how they participate.

- evaluating growth through the family approval and/or re-certification process
- predicting competencies and/or characteristics that may be triggered during a placement and creating plans to prevent disruptions
- supporting the matching process between parents and youth by comparing the needs of the youth with the strength and challenge areas of the caregivers
- reviewing after a placement has occurred and relating the results specifically to the needs of the youth
- identifying future training needs for families
- identifying topics / themes for support groups and supporting staff development and retention.

## **2. CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**

There are seven modules in the classroom curriculum, totaling about 17 hours of training:

1. Introduction and understanding the impact of trauma on youth in foster care
2. Parenting youth who have experienced trauma
3. Developing and sustaining a healthy and supportive relationship with your youth

4. Nurturing youth's cultural / racial / ethnic needs and sexual orientation / gender identity and expression
5. Understanding and managing youth's challenging behaviors – Part 1
6. Understanding and managing youth's challenging behaviors – Part 2
7. A new suitcase of parenting knowledge and skills.

The seven training sessions cover core skills, knowledge, and competencies families need to understand. A range of teaching strategies are used during the training sessions, including lecture, small and large group activities, resource review and videos.

Each session will take about 2.5 hours to complete plus about 20 minutes if the session includes doing the pre- and post-test. The classroom content is designed to be used with a team of an experienced parent and a professional or staff trainer. This model was very successful in the CORE Teen pilot. Based on parent feedback, the co-trainer model provided a sense of safety, security and enhanced participation by the family members who attended the training.

The classroom training provides content specific to teens with behavioral and emotional needs, provides opportunities for participants to learn from each other, stimulates conversations among parenting partners and/or support networks, develops best parenting strategies and builds knowledge and skills.

Parents indicated their satisfaction with the curriculum through the following statements: "CORE Teen should be required for all parents"; "This training is the best training on teens"; "It helped me to take a step back"; "I learned that I needed to be calm before I could even begin to work with my teen"; "My older kids that are out of the house are like, why didn't you do this with us, we didn't know there was a better way"; and "If I had this training before, I might not have had to disrupt my previous teen, I might have had the skills to work through it".

Feedback from the pilot sites indicated there could be multiple uses for some of the classroom content beyond training current and prospective families: marketing their agency and mission, educating staff to the needs of families, increasing retention of families by using some of the content to aid in conversations between worker and family, and increasing the understanding of trauma and the impact of trauma on brain development for a variety of audiences. With some adaptation, the pilot sites believed the content could also be used in conversations with teens and biological families when considering reunification efforts and placement prevention of youth who may have challenging behaviors.

### **3. RIGHT TIME TRAINING**

The right time training is video based, and is designed to be used in support groups, during case manager home visits, or at times when the family is experiencing a particular challenge or situation. The right time training can also be used to help families prepare for or adjust to a change, helping them to understand the root causes and supporting how they can adapt to the event. An example may be when a family is preparing to have a teen come to live with them; you may use the right time training to help the family increase their awareness of how best to

welcome the teen into their home. After the teen has been with the family for a while, the right time training could be used during a time when the family is having a difficult adjustment. The right time training can also be used after a difficult time; helping the family debrief and consider how they would manage the situation differently.

There are eight themes— each with a video, discussion guide and action plan:

- Trauma Informed Parenting 1
- Trauma Informed Parenting 2
- Relationship Development
- Parental Adaptation
- Parental Regulation
- Continued Connections
- Transitions
- Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Expression

Right time videos are about 20 minutes in length and include stories from youth exploring how this theme impacted them and how it related to their behavior, resource families talking about the importance of the topic and how best to parent , and experts describing why this theme may be important and offering guidance.

The discussion guide helps to facilitate an individual’s reflection or group discussions after participants view the video, and an action plan helps the family consider what changes can be made and how to support those changes.

The evaluation results confirmed families liked the right time training and saw it helped them either prepare for, address or debrief after a change or event occurred. They also reported that would like to use right time training to help their friends and family understand the unique needs of the youth placed in their homes and become more supportive and accepting. They also liked the flexibility of being able to access the training from their home whenever they wanted. They liked hearing the voices of youth and “real” parents who have experiences and tips to share. They found these both helpful and validating. Parents predicted they would want to watch them several times throughout their parenting journey.

Although the right time training was created with the intent that it would often be used as a discussion tool for workers and family, due to the time constraints within the pilot, families viewed and processed the right time training on their own. Although families still indicated there was great value in the material, it is recommended that sites consider the benefits of using the right time training as a relationship development tool for workers to use during their visits with family. Engaging in discussions about the themes may better predict what the triggers are for the families and how to best consider and support placement of a youth in their home.

Pilot sites believed there was a great deal of flexibility in how the right time resources would be used. As with some of the classroom content, they believed the videos could be used for marketing of their agency, family recruitment and retention, support group topics, staff development and generalized education to community partners.

### **What was the piloting process for CORE Teen?**

The curriculum was piloted in four sites: Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Florida and the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina. Each site was designed somewhat differently.

- Pennsylvania is a state-supervised, county-administered state with 67 counties. CORE Teen was piloted in two regions, both served by one private agency: Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries.
- Florida is a privatized state, so the project was piloted in one region through Embrace Families, a private agency contracted to support the interests of the state.
- Tennessee is state administered and five regions participated in the pilot.
- The Eastern Band of Cherokee piloted the curriculum within their tribal community.

Each site was asked to recruit 35 current or prospective families who were then asked to complete all elements of the CORE Teen curriculum.

In addition, sites were requested to have the trainers of the classroom content complete a trainer fidelity form for each of the seven classroom sessions. A supervisor was also asked to observe each trainer and complete an additional trainer fidelity form.

Each site was also expected to recruit 35 families who would serve as the comparison group and complete the following:

- Signing consent
- Completing a baseline outcome survey
- Completing a final outcome survey

The project evaluation team also conducted focus groups for both those who participated in the CORE Teen curriculum (the intervention group) and a comparison group who did not participate in the CORE Teen curriculum.

### **What are the resources I can access to implement CORE Teen?**

#### **Classroom –**

- **Trainer Guide** – The Trainer Guide will provide all of the content needed to successfully facilitate the classroom training. Each session includes trainer preparation tips, content for each session with accompanying power point slides, handouts to support either discussion or activities throughout the training, and a pre- and post-test for each session. A final section contains optional activities for groups that are comprised of American Indian and Alaskan Native populations. These activities were

created to provide the trainer with options to ensure cultural relevance to those who may be participating in the training.

- **Participant Guide** – This guide is for those who are attending the training as participants. Each session includes power point slides and handouts in the classroom training. The Participant Guide also includes copies of the pre- and post-test for participants to complete.
- **Resource Notebook** – The notebook includes useful resource articles and publications for participants that are mentioned (but not covered) during the classroom training. It is anticipated participants will review the resources outside of the classroom sessions.

**Self-Assessment** – The self-assessment is housed on an electronic platform known as REDCap. Although you will most likely be able to access REDCap free of charge, you may need technical support to use this application. CORE Teen staff can provide the REDCap data dictionary that can support system integration within your site.

**Right Time** – The right time training is hosted on a Moodle platform, allowing for individual participant access and electronic completion and provision of a training certificate. The Moodle platform is free, but your site may require technical support as you infuse this training into your individualized learning systems.

### **What else do I need to consider?**

**Trainer Skills** – CORE Teen is an intermediate to advanced training. It is important to consider how best to support your trainers, particularly the parent co-trainer who may experience triggers related to the content of some sessions. Sufficient support should be accessible to ensure that the learning environment maintains a focus on participant needs, encouraging dialogue while also allowing for engagement and digestion of information. The Trainer Guide includes some trainer tips to consider, but there is some content that would benefit from either group discussion or supervisory discussion to ensure the trainers are adequately prepared to facilitate the topics.

**Staff Engagement and Education** – Based on feedback from the pilot, parents experienced some frustration when they would reach out to their workers to discuss the curriculum, and the workers didn't know the content. Often, the parents were transferred back to the trainer for conversation, resulting in the family feeling some frustration and the worker missing an opportunity to learn and engage with the family. Ensuring staff are as knowledgeable of the content as families would be beneficial.

**Family Recruitment for Participation** – In CORE Teen focus groups, families shared that it was difficult for them to make the commitment to attend the training, but once they participated, they wanted more information and were eager to come back to the next session. You may need to provide some encouragement to get parents to sign up.

**Schedule** — Consider dosage of information as you prepare to implement CORE Teen. Some pilot sites offered classes only on Saturdays, while others offered sessions on weeknights and Saturday. The site that offered only Saturday training indicated they would not recommend this approach because there was too much information presented and not enough time to allow the families to digest what they were hearing.

**Family First Legislation** – The CORE Teen curriculum may be helpful as you implement the Families First legislation and seek to ensure more children and teens are in family placements rather than group care. CORE Teen will not address every issue families face, but families who recognize their role in adapting their parenting style to meet the needs of the youth rather than reacting to the behaviors are more likely to succeed in caring for youth with more challenges. This training may also be beneficial for congregate care / residential treatment facilities as you work with them to transition youth from congregate setting to family.

**Tracking and Monitoring the Impact** – Consider how to track and monitor implementation of CORE Teen. It will be important for you to know what works, what you may need to adapt and what families are responding well to. Establish a tracking and monitoring system that supports the goals of your state or organization.