



Building School Psychologists' Skills with Students in Foster Care

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Agenda



- Demographics
- Challenges for Students
- Challenges for School Staff
- 3 Tiers of Intervention
- Consultation
- Resources

Demographics



- **Prevalence Rates**
 - Nearly tripled in past 20 years (McKellar, 2007)
 - Approximately 500,000 children
 - **Placement**
 - Family homes
 - 46% living with nonrelatives
 - Ultimate goal= reunification with biological family
 - **Age**
 - Average age of 10
 - Most enter system between ages of 11-16
 - **Race/Ethnicity**
 - Minority backgrounds disproportionately represented
 - Majority of African American descent
- (US Dept of Health & Human Services, 2008)

Challenges for Students



Physical

- Abuse and neglect
- Low weight, short stature, and developmental delays
- Acute illnesses that go untreated
- Poor nutrition
- Develop chronic illnesses
- Inadequate immunizations

(McKellar, 2007)

Challenges for Students



Social-Emotional

- Attachment issues
- Post traumatic stress
- Mourning/grief
- Anxiety/fear
- Self-esteem/insecurity

Challenges for Students



Academic

- High rates of absenteeism and tardiness
- At-risk for low academic performance and retention
- Likely to be at least one grade level behind same-age peers
- At risk for scoring poorly on school accountability measures (i.e., standardized tests)
- Significant risk for dropping out of school and not receiving a graduate equivalency degree

(Altshuler, 2003; McKellar, 2007; Rhodes, 2005)

Challenges for Students



Behavioral

- Sustaining attention
- Appropriate work habits
- Unstructured activities
- About 24% have been suspended or expelled

(McKellar, 2007; Scherr, 2007)

Special Education



- 31% of children living in foster care qualify for special education (Scherr, 2007)
- Most common disabilities:
 - Mental retardation
 - Learning disabilities
 - Emotional disturbances (McKellar, 2007)

Challenges for School Psychologists



- Knowledge base of foster care system
 - Common terminology
 - Surrogate parents
 - Laws (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, age of emancipation)
- School records
- Evaluations (background information)
- Increased individual counseling
- Additional community collaboration
- Involving parents (meetings, forms)

Surrogate Parents



- IDEIA requires that children with disabilities who do not have parents to advocate for them in the special education process be given a surrogate parent to make decisions about special education issues
- A child needs a surrogate parent if:
 - No parent can be identified
 - Cannot find the child's parent
 - Child is a ward of the state
 - Child is homeless

(U. S. Department of Education, 2010)

Surrogate Parents



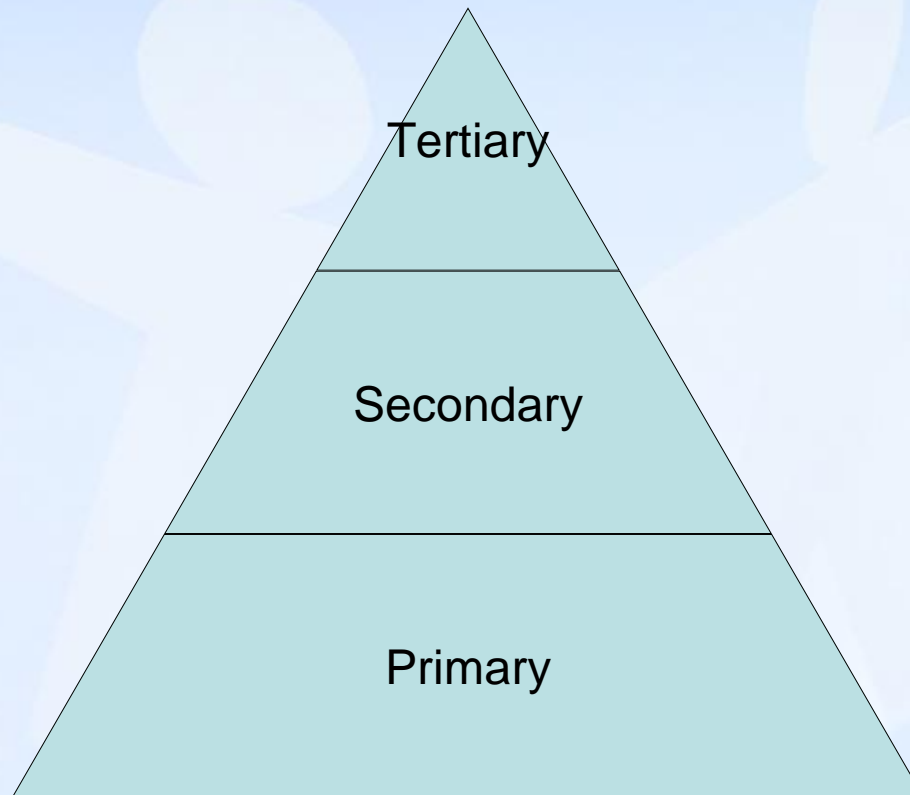
- Appointed by superintendent of school district or judge
- Should be assigned within 30 days
- Child's school district of residence is responsible for assignment
- In Ohio:
 - Ohio Department of Education has a list of available surrogate parents
 - person that successfully completes training can act as surrogate
 - person with a conflict of interest cannot

Challenges for School Staff



- Behavioral challenges
- Sensitivity in lesson planning
- Delayed enrollment
- Continuation of special education services
- Accumulating credits for graduation
- Transition services

3 Tiers of Intervention



Primary Intervention



- **Identification system** (Staub & Meighan, 2007)
- **Educational presentations**
 - At beginning of year with periodic review sessions throughout
- **Structured environments/Positive Behavior Supports**

Identification System



- District wide
 - Enrollment form
 - Computer system indicator
- Helps alleviate confusion
- Assists in locating records

Teacher Presentations



- **Safe vs. unsafe situations** (Scherr, 2008)
 - how to decide when they are in danger
 - how they can remove themselves from unsafe situations
 - how to identify safe adults in their lives
- **Bully Prevention Programs**
 - Empowering victims
 - E.g., Bullies to Buddies, Preventing Classroom Bullying

School Psychologist Presentations



Increase staff knowledge level of foster care:

- Commonly used terminology that is phrased in a sensitive manner (e.g., birth parent versus biologic parent)
- Understanding the foster care process
- Learning how to identify who to contact in the child's life about educational concerns
- Physical, academic, behavioral and psychological challenges faced by children foster care
- Interventions that may increase a teacher's success in working with these students
- Increased awareness on child maltreatment

Community Information



- Newsletters, brochures, bulletin boards
- How parents and educators can help all children be successful
 - being responsive to needs
 - helping children stay safe
 - building resiliency

Structured Environments



- Helps staff & students be more successful
 - predict what will come next
 - what is expected of them
 - what the consequences are for behavior
- Examples:
 - predictable schedules
 - structured transition times
 - posting clear rules and consequences
 - consistent follow through by school staff

(Rhode, Jenson, & Reavis, 1992)

Secondary Intervention



Target:

- Class
 - Being sensitive to differences
 - Dealing with teasing/bullying
- Small group of school staff that currently work with students in foster care
 - Extension of information shared in school psychologist presentations

Secondary Intervention



- Small group of fostered children
 - social skills
 - emotion management
 - self-esteem (Scherr, 2008)
 - problem solving skills
 - conflict resolution
 - anger management skills

The Most Effective Groups



- Review past lesson
- Directly teach skills
- Model appropriate behavior
- Role play/Practice
- Receive feedback & reinforcement

(Sheridan, 1995)

Tertiary Intervention



- Roles of the School Psychologist
- Individual Behavior Plans
- Individual Counseling

Roles of the School Psychologist



- Initiate interactions with the student's previous school/gather information
- Curriculum-based assessment
- Assist with placement decisions
- Encourage involvement with extra-curricular activities (Scherr, 2008)
- Choose a consistent, yet sensitive, teacher whose classroom is structured (Schwartz, 1999)

Roles of the School Psychologist



- Explain the procedures & expectations of the classroom
- Analyze student's risk and protective factors (Scherr, 2008)
- Keep up-to-date and accurate records of assessments & interventions
- Cultivate relationships with adults
- Help maintain peer groups (Lips, 2007)

Individual Behavior Plans



- Conduct an FBA
- Positive behavior supports and operant principles-especially for young children (Scherr, 2008)
- Behavior Education Program
- Suspensions may not be the most successful consequence
- Positive reinforcement interventions
 - E.g., Token Economy, Points for Grumpy

Individual Counseling



- Behavior management/self management
(McKellar, 2007)
- Prevent bullying and teasing
- Problem solving
- Mediation
- Build resiliency
- Develop and practice self-advocacy & basic life skills

Individual Counseling



- Develop a “family statement” (Scherr, 2008)
- Encourage/facilitate extra-curricular activity
- Develop short & long-term future goals
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)
 - correct cognitive distortions (e.g., my mother gave me away because I was bad) & replace them with accurate pieces of information

Individual Counseling



- Teens: post-secondary educational opportunities, career possibilities, and finances (McKellar, 2007)
- Community agency collaboration
- Do not minimize child's experience ("everything will be ok;" Fahlberg, 1991)
- Do not pretend to know all the answers (Fahlberg, 1991)

Teacher Consultation



- 3 key factors in promoting resiliency:
 - caring and supportive relationships
 - positive and high expectations
 - opportunities for meaningful participation in the classroom (McKellar, 2007)
- Sensitive lesson plans
- Effective interventions
- Monitor progress frequently

Family Consultation



- **Provide education** (Scherr, 2008; Swick, 2007)
 - typical child development
 - facilitating healthy interactions with peers and adults
 - utilizing positive strategies to manage problematic behaviors
 - conflict resolution skills
 - creating caring environments
- **Provide additional resources**
 - literature
 - electronic resources
 - community agencies

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Agenda revisited



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