

# **The Importance of Wellbeing for Children in Foster Care**

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# Presentation Overview

- Personal Background
- The Significance of the Foster Care Experience on Child Wellbeing
- The Importance of Normalcy
- Myths about Normalcy
- Age Appropriate Developmental Activities
- Strategies to Incorporate Normalcy
- Understanding Supervision and the Prudent Parent Standard
- Managing issues and “what ifs?”
- Dating
- Responsible Social Media Use



## **Personal Background: Why I do this work.**

# What Exactly is Wellbeing?

- Aristotle & *Eudaimonia*.
- Wellbeing is the highest human good.
- When people are happy, they live better lives.
  - When people are unhappy they tend to live worse lives.
- What are some factors that contribute to positive/negative wellbeing for kids in foster care?

# Wellbeing and the Foster Care Experience

## Positive Factors

- Safety and protection
- Family preservation & reunification efforts
- Basic needs provided
- Superb resources for kids to achieve
- Motivated caregivers, clinicians, and child welfare professionals

## Negative Factors

- Instability
- Over-reaction and pathologizing of normal behavior
- Adversarial relationships
- Barriers to *genuine* relationships
- Lack of social development

# The Importance of Normalcy

- What is Normalcy?
- Advocating for change.
- How normalcy impacts mental health.
- Using Normalcy to improve wellbeing.
- Discussion

# Myths About Normalcy

- Kids in foster care cannot have friends or spend time with them.
- Kids in foster care cannot be involved with recreational school programs.
- Kids in foster care cannot have a cellphone, or use social media like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.
- Kids in foster care need to stay inside the foster home all the time.
- Youth in foster care are not allowed to date and cannot go to the prom.
- Youth who are 16 years old cannot get a job if they are in foster care.

## Age-Appropriate Developmental Activities

- 0-5: Coloring, playing outdoors, etc.
- 5-10: playground visits, movies, age-appropriate organizations.
- 10-13: Some extracurricular school activities, outdoor activities, swimming.
- 13-15: Sports, most extracurricular school activities, some unsupervised visits, sleepovers, etc.
- 16-18: employment, dating, more unsupervised activities.



# Strategies to Incorporate Normalcy

- School and Extracurricular Activities
- Community Engagement
- On “Foster Youth” Outings
- The Importance of *unsupervised* activities.
- What does supervision mean?

# Supervision & Parental Authority

- Prudent Parent Standard & Legal Protections
- **Who...**
- **What...**
- **When...**
- **Where...**
- **Why...**
- **How...**

# What if... Things go Badly?

- Vignettes:
  - A 7 year old foster child is playing on a swing set at the local park. They keep swinging faster and faster and decide to jump off. The landing wasn't very good and they break their arm... What do you do?

# What if... Things go Badly?

- Vignettes:
  - A 15 year old foster child wants to attend the high school football game. You drop them off, but then receive a call 2 hours later from a police officer. As it turns out, the youth skipped out and left with their friends and got caught shoplifting a few blocks away from the school... What do you do?

# Dating

- Teens are going to want to date.
- How we approach this issue matters.
- What is appropriate vs inappropriate?
- Exercising caution: education and caregiver reactions.

# Responsible Social Media Use

- Social Media is more popular than ever.
- Teens social media use and behavior.
- Having purposeful discussions with youth over social media habits.
- Reminding youth of the permanent nature of the internet.
- Safety and privacy settings

# Thank you!

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