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POST PLACEMENT A & P SERVICES

FIRST LINE OF INTERVENTION SERVICES: First Line of Intervention (FLI) are services that meet the immediacy needs of the parents first. Very often in times of crisis what is needed **First** is to treat the parental reaction to the child's difficult behavior, particularly in times where parental violence (corporal punishment) or commitment breaking is being threatened. We cannot even think of beginning to deal with the causes of the child's difficult behavior until we **First** deal with the parental reaction to that behavior.

It is important to remember that we as members of the human race have far more in common than we have not in common. One of the things most humans have in common, whether they are foster children coming into a new Adoptive or Permanent (A&P) home, A&P parents receiving those children, or workers supervising those placements is that we, us human beings being raised in this American culture, never really learned how to deal with painful feelings and emotions, particularly when those painful emotions are directed at us. This is why FLI services are so important in preventing many, if not most, disruptions. We are acknowledging the parents reaction to the child's difficult behavior and dealing with the parent **when** they need us most --- in the heat of the moment and immediately.

Crisis is opportunity. Opportunity to learn. Opportunity to grow as human beings. A&P parents, and even the social workers who supervise them, learn a lot about themselves in the middle of a crisis. We all learn how strong we really are when we face a crisis head on and work it through without breaking commitment to a child. And it is always important to assure A&P parents that they will grow as human beings with the learning experience this or any new crisis will bring to them. With the right frame of mind crisis can be looked upon as one of the greatest gifts our adolescent children will bring to us while they remain adolescents. A gift that tests, and then strengthens, the human spirit. We (A&P parents, socials workers, and children) are not the wonderful people we are today because we avoided all the pain that all the crises in our lives brought to us. We are the wonderful people we are today because we learned something from every difficult experience we ever faced head on.

With the above statement in mind, here are some of the **First Line of Intervention** post placement services that *You Gotta Believe* offers its families that we truly believe can be easily replicated at minimal, or no, cost at any other agency. We do not provide these services because we are funded to provide them. We provide these services because they are a necessary part of the work that we do.

1) **24 Hour Access:**

All of our families have access to at least one emergency number that they can call in the event of an emergency or crisis. Often they have more than one because often our worker's give families their individual cell phone or home phone numbers.

It's interesting to note that even though every family has our 800-601-1779 # for emergencies, rarely do we get any emergency calls on that number. And the times we do get calls on that number it is usually a very necessary call. Our workers get more emergency calls than the main number, generally because the families feel closer to those people they are directly dealing with.

Though it goes against common wisdom, families who have emergency 24 hour access rarely will take advantage of it even when they have worker's personal cell phones or even home numbers. The exception to this rule is when there is a true emergency that anyone would want to know about right away. However, the mere knowledge that families know they can reach out when they have to at any time of day keeps many of them from doing so until Monday morning or the next work day.

2) **Buddy System – Shadow Workers:**

This is a program where we hook up experienced families with new families who just received placements. In our Long Island program, since we do the supervision of most of the placements, this program is utilized when we feel it is necessary to assign a more experienced parent if it so happens that the worker we assign is not an experienced parent. Also, the worker is obligated to make at least monthly in person contact but we also expect that our worker will contact families with newly placed children on a weekly basis by phone just to check in and see how they are doing.

In our New York City program, where we transfer our family to the other agency, assigning a buddy family/shadow worker is essential. This worker, after a placement is made, will make at least weekly phone contact to see how the family is doing. Our intervention here is proactive, we make the call, and consistent, weekly. We want to learn about little problems so that they do not snowball into bigger problems. We want to help solve problems before they become crisis in any way we can.

3) **Short Term Immediate Crisis Intervention Counseling:**

When a crisis hits a family a referral for long term therapy or treatment at the time of the crisis is often meaningless, particularly when the therapy program has a long drawn out intake process and waiting list.

This service provides a "bridge" to long term therapy and treatment by assigning an experienced therapist to the family immediately on a short term basis. This counseling is structured to be short term and meant to be a bridge into more long term therapy for those families that would benefit from that form of treatment.

4) **Respite:**

This is a service that by-and-large parents provide to other parents when a parent needs a break from their child. Sometimes *You Gotta Believe* staff work it out formally, other times the families themselves work it out informally.

The idea behind this intervention is that it is solely meant to give the parent having trouble a “time out” or a short vacation, a break, from the child and the situation.

Before any parent accepts respite we make sure to advise them of three crucial things:

- The child that left is the exact same child who is coming back. The point of respite is to give the parent a break. If respite has a positive effect on the child’s behavior all the better, but parents cannot expect that it will have any influence on the child’s behavior whatsoever.
- Even though we ask Respite Parents to be sensitive about doing this, very often the Respite Parent who takes a child in for respite tells the parent who needs the break from the child what a wonderfully well-behaved child they have.
- That the child will come back and say how much better it is, and how much more they liked being with the Respite parent that relieved you. They’ll go on and on about how much better the rules are over there and how they had so much more freedom, etc, etc.

Ideally, Respite is best done informally with a buddy family who the parent already has a relationship with. This way the child feels he or she is simply going over to “Johnny’s house for sleepover” rather than giving his parent(s) a vacation or break. Also, with a buddy family the favor can always be returned someday.

5) **Support Groups:**

This is a time where parents can get together on a monthly basis to talk to other parents about issues and concerns and seek their solace and support. It is very important for parents in the middle of a crisis to seek advice of other parents, many of whom are going through their own hard times as well.

These are extraordinary meetings for people to go to who need advice and help with their child on a whole range of issues including getting ideas about discipline and to learn how other families coped with their own emotional pain when their children had driven them crazy in the past.

And the major benefit of getting families in crisis to a support group is that they can be with parents who went through very difficult times and stayed committed to their kids nonetheless.

SECOND LINE OF INTERVENTION SERVICES:

Kids commit difficult behaviors that really upset their parents. Once the parental reaction to the difficult behavior is under control, and the parents' commitment to the child is clear, then *the second line of intervention* can begin. This intervention is geared to help deal with modifying whatever difficult behavior the child may be acting out.

It is important to note here that in close to 80% of all our crises after we facilitate our *First Line of Intervention Services* noted above, these *Second Line of Intervention Services* noted below are unnecessary.

Once parents feel that their emotions and reactions are under control again, they very often can handle the difficult behaviors their children act out. In fact, seemingly magical to many parents, many parents discover that their children's difficult behaviors often subside or disappear altogether once they, the parents, are back in control of their reactions, emotions, and feelings.

However, some kids do need treatment to modify their difficult behaviors. We teach parents that no matter what the treatment is (even if it is out-of-home treatment, such as in-patient hospitalization, a drug treatment program, jail, or a residential treatment center obtained to help modify a child's non-criminal, non-drug related, non-mentally ill, but nonetheless, difficult behavior) that the child continues to need an unconditionally committed parent throughout his or her treatment. This is one of the major tragedies of the foster care system. Sometimes foster children need treatment and the system does not allow the current foster parent to function as the child's parent and participate in permanency planning for the child. Treatment is viewed as a rejection by the foster parent of the child, very often when it should not be and very often when the foster parent does not want it to be. Hence, *You Gotta Believe* strongly emphasizes the need for parental commitment and involvement no matter what the treatment needs of the child are. And our staff will help advocate with those treatment resources to treat our parents as the child's parent, particularly in those situations where your adoption has not been finalized as yet.

Below is a list of the *Second Line of Intervention Services* that *You Gotta Believe* provides to help our parents deal specifically with their child's particularly difficult behavior and acting out.

6) Referral for Long Term Therapy:

You Gotta Believe does not have a particular view of which type of therapy is best. Sometimes we refer the child for therapy. Other times we refer the child and parent. Other times we just refer one or both of the parents, particularly during those times when the parents are reacting to a previous life stress like abuse in their history, maybe a previous unresolved loss, or perhaps even a current marital difficulty, that the child's simple presence is bringing out.

You Gotta Believe tries our best to develop a list of therapists who are adoption sensitive and commitment orientated and who charge reasonable fees for working class families such as the families *You Gotta Believe* by-and-large places with.

You Gotta Believe believes that while there is no better substitute for good therapy, no therapy is better than bad therapy. It is very important when making a referral for therapy that you communicate with the therapist and educate them about teen and pre-teen adoption and the need for parental commitment to the child no matter what. Too many therapists who do not understand adoption feel they must be the family's fortune teller and determine for them whether the adoption will "work out" or not. This should never be a goal of therapy and if you don't know the therapist's worldview or abilities in advance of your referral, often therapy turns into fortune telling.

You Gotta Believe sometimes gets calls from therapists soliciting referrals from our program. We welcome their calls with open arms. We offer each of these therapists an opportunity to learn from us about the placement of teens and pre-teens. We ask each of them to take our 10-week "A-OKAY" (Adopting Older Kids And Youth) parent preparation class. We let them know that we would feel very comfortable making referrals to them after they had the opportunity to complete our training. Since so few therapists soliciting our referrals take us up on our offer, we have found that the ones that do tend to be well worth referring our families to.

7) **Behavior Management Specialists:**

Sometimes we place a child who simply does not know how to behave. Sometimes we place this child with a parent without a lot of parenting experience who simply does not know how to teach a child to behave. We have some very experienced parents who will go into a family's home to simply teach the child to behave and to teach the parent some skills, both goals being achieved through a **mediation process**.

Our Behavior Management Specialist will work with a family on a weekly basis and help child and parent to **contract** with each other about what behaviors they will or will not do in the upcoming week.

8) **Referral for Out-of-Home Treatment:**

* **Short Term:** Sometimes, on relatively rare occasions, a child's behavior might be so extreme that it might warrant a hospitalization, or a placement in a diagnostic center, on a short term basis for evaluation. We have seen this happen, for instance, after the child has disclosed a traumatic past event such as sexual abuse. The child develops a trust with his or her new parents that enabled him or her to talk about this past trauma. However, because of the painful emotions the disclosure releases, sometimes violent or suicidal behavior will follow. Because of this it might become necessary for the child to be evaluated in an out-of-home setting. Usually child is able to return home and lead a relatively normal life if he

had a family committed to seeing him through his treatment during his hospitalization or diagnostic stay.

***Long Term:** Much more rarely a child's behavior is so severe and out-of-control that they need to be treated out-of-home on a long term basis. Depending on what challenges the child is presenting will determine the form of long term treatment. For instance:

- **Drug Abuse** might warrant a placement in a residential therapeutic community. Drug programs are clear that they will only work with a family if the parents are committed to working with the child's treatment team.
- **A criminal act** might warrant a stay in a juvenile treatment center for a youth convicted of a crime.
- **A serious mental illness** might warrant a placement in a long term psychiatric center.
- **Severe acting out behavior** might warrant a placement in a residential treatment center specializing in behavior management.

Whatever the treatment needs of the child might be, does not in any way, shape, or form mean that the parent is breaking commitment to that child. In fact, the only reason that any of the above treatment modalities stand a chance of succeeding is because the child will have a parent looking out for him or her to see that their treatment is going well. Also, it is very important for the child to know his parents are involved with his treatment plan and planning for his return home. Every child needs to know what his or her future holds in store for her.

ONGOING SUPPORT SERVICES:

After our first and second line of intervention services are implemented, we provide a variety of services on an ongoing basis. These services are geared toward creating community among adoptive parents of older children. Very often families are not experiencing crisis and their children are behaving wonderfully. However, it is still important that these families network with each other because the world at large, up to and including their family, friends, and neighbors think they are crazy for adopting teens and pre-teens. These services are meant to always remind families that there is a community of supportive people in their lives who did the exact same thing that they did. These services are as follows:

9) **Advocacy:** Advocacy with the schools. Advocacy with the mental health system. Advocacy with the agency the child has come from or the child is with. If a family calls us needing help or advocacy with a problem we will help them. And we provide this help anytime after a placement and even after a finalization of an adoption.

10) **"Continuing the Learning":** We invite all our families to continue learning from the leadership within our program both on the radio and TV. We air a show every

Sunday night entitled "*The Adopting Teens & 'Tweens Radio Forum*" from 6:30-7pm (Eastern Time) that can be listen to locally on the radio on WGBB radio 1240 on the AM dial. And if you are a person who does not get that radio station on your radio you can listen on-line by logging on to the *You Gotta Believe* website, www.yougottabelieve.org, or by logging on to the radio station's website, www.am1240wgb.com. The third Sunday of the month is our nation-wide adoption support group. Any one who is raising an adopted teen is invited to call in with an issue they may be having. You will get a chance to brainstorm with other adoptive parents who will be live in our studio that evening. You can also check our website site to watch our cable access television show entitled "*The Adopting Teens & 'Tweens Show.*" One show airs in Brooklyn every Thursday at noon and 8pm. You can watch a live-stream of the show by logging on to www.bcat.tv/bcat. We also have two cable access televisions show on Long Island: Cablevision of Woodbury and Cablevision of Hauppauge and Brookhaven. You can check our website to see the time and channel of the show.

11) Social Activities: Some people will only come out for fun events. So we make sure to organize some fun things through the year to get families together. Some of the social events we plan on a regular basis include picnics, a day at Splish Splash Water Ride Park, Holiday parties, an evening at Cyclone Stadium, trips to various Casinos, etc.

12) Parent Panels: We truly believe the process of sharing with other families helps the family who is doing the sharing. So even when our committed families are going through a hard time, we ask them to come to our parent panel and talk to some of our new families. This is a great way of "receiving through giving." Families going through a tough time have the opportunity to speak to the power of their commitment and to reinforce that they are doing something wonderfully good even during times where the children do not particularly appreciate what they are doing. During these times it is good for the family to know that the *You Gotta Believe* community at-large really appreciates what they are doing.

5) Support Groups: Parent and Teens: Parent support groups were noted earlier in *first line of intervention services*. These meetings are also crucial to keep families in touch with each other on an on-going basis as well. We run these monthly groups in both downtown Brooklyn and Eastern Long Island and we simultaneously have teen groups as well. The teen groups are a great way for teens to spend some time with young people who have had similar life experiences. Also don't forget our radio support group on the third Sunday of every month from 6:30pm-7pm eastern time by logging on to www.am1240wgb.com

Listen to a live broadcast of You Gotta Believe's "The Adopting Teens & 'Tweens Radio Forum" co-hosted and produced by Pat O'Brien every Sunday night from 6:30-7pm (EST) on 1240 on the AM dial or listen to a live-stream of the broadcast by logging on to www.am1240wgb.com/home.htm After the Sunday broadcast you can also listen to an archived shows dating back to March 2, 2008 by clicking www.adoptingteensandtweens.com You may Contact PAT O'BRIEN directly at 718-570-5134 or yqbpat@msn.com, and friend him on Facebook at P.J. O'Brien You Gotta Believe's website is www.yougottabelieve.org