Children's Home Society of North Carolina

Are You *Tuned-In?*

Attunement & Consistent Response

The experience of trauma can cause the world to feel like a scary, unpredictable, and unsafe place. Our goal as providers and caregivers is to create an environment for children that feels safe, both physically and emotionally. One of the ways we can do this is with attunement, or by "tuning in" to the child's emotions, needs, and thoughts, and then responding calmly instead of reacting to the behavior. This can be powerful and healing, particularly when done consistently. But, it can also be harder than it sounds, as any experienced foster parent will tell you. Children who have experienced trauma may have confusing, intense, and sudden feelings and reactions that bewilder adults, particularly when they are feeling overwhelmed.

6 Tips To Try:

1. **Be curious.** Take a breath, step back, and wonder why this might be happening. We sometimes refer to this as being a "feelings detective." What is the underlying need?
2. **Practice active listening**. Nodding and reflecting back what you see–without trying to solve the problem–can help a child or teen feel understood. *"That sounds really hard."*

3. **Keep in mind** that much of our children's communication is nonverbal. Tune in to body language and physical cues.
4. **Name & normalize feelings**. *"It looks like you are frustrated. Having a schedule change at the last minute can make anyone feel frustrated."*
5. **Tune into our own feelings and reactions**. We can only respond effectively to a child that is dysregulated or "offline," when we ourselves are regulated.
6. **Look for triggers**. Some parents find it helpful to keep a journal and note what events occurred prior to the challenging behavior. Over time, you may notice a pattern that wasn't immediately obvious.

Common triggers
for children who have experienced trauma

- Unpredictability or sudden change
- Transitions
- Loss of control
- Feeling vulnerable
- Feeling rejected
- Confrontation
- Loneliness
- Sensory overload (too much stimulation from the

environment)
- Intimacy (safety, love, security, family)
- Peace/calm/quiet

For additional ideas and activities, ask your Specialist about the ***ARC-Ways Toolkit***!

Source: Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents, Second Edition (2019). Margaret E. Blaustein and Kristine M. Kinniburgh

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