

CareCertify LLC

Foster Care Training Series

FC-06

Positive Behavior Support & De-escalation

Participant Guide

Foster Care Training Series · Audience: Foster Parents · Agency Staff · Treatment Foster Care Providers · CE Hours: 1.0

Connection Before Correction

Children in foster care often have behaviors rooted in trauma — survival strategies that don't fit a safe home. Punitive, harsh approaches re-traumatize and don't work; corporal punishment is never allowed in foster care. What works is positive behavior support: connection, structure, and discipline that teaches rather than punishes.

This guide covers reading behavior as communication, building connection and structure, effective discipline, the practices that are prohibited, and de-escalation. The shift is from controlling behavior to understanding and guiding the child.

Learning Objectives — by the end of this module you will be able to:

- Explain behavior as communication of an unmet need
- Apply positive behavior support and connection
- Use effective, developmentally appropriate discipline
- Identify prohibited practices, including corporal punishment
- De-escalate and know when to get help

Section 1: Behavior Is Communication

Children's behavior communicates needs and feelings they can't always put into words. In foster care, much challenging behavior is rooted in trauma — a survival response, a bid for control after powerlessness, or a sign of fear or unmet need. Looking past the behavior to the need behind it is the first step. When you understand what a behavior is communicating, you can respond to the need rather than just react to the behavior.

Section 2: Positive Behavior Support and Connection

Positive behavior support focuses on teaching skills and reinforcing desired behavior rather than only punishing problems. The foundation is connection — a child who feels safe and connected can learn and change. Notice and encourage what's going well, build warm relationships, and prevent problems through understanding and structure. Connection comes before correction, always.

Connection before correction

A child has to feel safe and connected before they can regulate or change. Lead with relationship; correction without

connection doesn't heal or work.

Section 3: Structure, Routines, and Clear Expectations

Children — especially traumatized ones — feel safer with consistent routines and predictability, which calm a brain on alert for danger. Set clear, age-appropriate expectations, and follow through calmly and consistently. Structure isn't harshness; it's the warm, reliable framework within which children feel safe. Balance warmth with clear, consistent limits.

Section 4: Effective, Developmentally Appropriate Discipline

Discipline comes from a word meaning 'to teach' — its goal is to guide a child toward better choices, not to punish or hurt. Use developmentally appropriate responses that relate to the behavior, are respectful, and are delivered calmly. Natural and logical consequences teach more than harsh punishment. After a hard moment, repair the relationship — reconnection is part of the teaching.

Section 5: Prohibited Practices

Some practices are never allowed in foster care: corporal or physical punishment (hitting, spanking, any physical pain); humiliation, shaming, threats, or verbal abuse; withholding food, sleep, shelter, or other basic needs; and unauthorized physical restraint or seclusion. These are harmful and re-traumatizing, and using them is maltreatment. Know your agency's policies — these prohibitions protect children and you.

No corporal punishment, ever

Hitting or spanking is never permitted in foster care, regardless of the behavior. It harms children and is reportable maltreatment.

Section 6: De-escalation

When a child is escalating, de-escalate through connection, not control. Stay calm, lower your voice, and give space. Acknowledge the feeling rather than arguing or issuing threats, and offer simple choices and a dignified way out of the moment. Keep everyone safe — your own calm is the most powerful de-escalation tool, and a regulated adult helps a dysregulated child settle.

Section 7: When and How to Get Help

Some behaviors are beyond what any caregiver can manage alone, especially with children who have significant needs. Get help: use your licensing worker, the child's treatment team, and crisis resources (the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for mental-health crises, 911 for imminent danger). Ask for training, support, and respite. Reaching out is responsible and strengthens your ability to care — it's never a failure.

Asking for help is strength

No one parents traumatized children perfectly or alone. Use your team, training, and respite — it's how you keep providing good care.

Key Terms

Term	What it means
Behavior as communication	The idea that behavior signals a need or feeling.
Positive behavior support	Teaching and reinforcing desired behavior, built on connection.
Discipline	Teaching and guiding behavior — not punishment or harm.
Corporal punishment	Physical punishment — never allowed in foster care.
Natural/logical consequences	Consequences that relate to the behavior and teach.
De-escalation	Calming a tense situation through connection and respect.

Check Your Understanding

1. What does it mean that behavior is communication?
2. What is positive behavior support, and what comes first?
3. What is the goal of discipline?
4. Name three prohibited practices in foster care.
5. When and how should you get help with behavior?

What's Next

Looking ahead

Next, FC-07: Cultural Responsiveness, Identity & ICWA covers honoring each child's culture and the special protections for Native children.