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Occupational Therapist's Impact in Current and Changing Roles and Routines for First-Time Foster Parents

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BACKGROUND

A foster parent is defined as being “intended to provide temporary, safe living arrangements and therapeutic services for children who cannot remain safely at home because of risk of maltreatment or inadequate care” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018.) Roles and routines are meaningful and valuable in individuals' lives, and foster parents may not understand the importance and chance of disruption when taking on a new, empowering role as a foster parent. Occupational therapists hold a unique role by understanding the significance of roles and routines and through education, support and techniques can help to decrease disruption to these domains. OT's can further play a vital role in educating population on current and changing roles and routines for the foster parent population and offer tools to establish, preserve and maintain these unique domains.

PURPOSE

To understand occupational therapist's impact in current and changing roles and routines for first-time foster parents as well as understanding how to establish, preserve and maintain such meaningful domains.

PROBLEM

There is little to no research on occupational therapists working with the foster parent population, specifically first-time foster parents.

Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Patty Boles and the incredible staff at Straight from the Heart

METHODS

Participants

Participants were gathered through personal contacts, mentor's personal contacts, word of mouth and snowball sampling.

- Foster, Adoptive & Kinship Care Education Program
- www.fakce.org

Observations

Straight from the Heart in San Marcos where verbal interactions with staff and the foster care population took place.



RESULTS

Survey & Interviews

Two surveys were created through Google forms containing both qualitative and quantitative questions. One survey was created for first-time foster parents and the other for foster parents with more than 3 months experience. Participants were given the option to participate in a 30–45-minute interview to better understand the foster parent population through Zoom, or phone.

- 37 survey responses
- 8 virtual interviews

Transcription & Analysis

Interviews were transcribed through Microsoft Word Dictation. Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

References



THEMES

Maintaining consistent routines provided structure for both the parent and child

“For the kids we had very consistent routines and I still am very structured with these kids because they had no structure, and they can't drive without it.”

Being your own advocate can decrease disruption of transition and routines

“I mean I definitely wish that I knew more about what rights we have, what we can ask for, what we can advocate for, when we can say no you know...we need to advocate for our kids and say no we can't do that appointment on that day because someone else is going to have a hard time that day.”

Lack of support from within the system

“The hardest thing about being a foster parent from day one and it is still today is there's no teams like you are on your own it is you and this child against the world...it's frustrating because even with the social worker who was gone for three weeks with this case, I couldn't get ahold of him, and it became more of a nightmare.”

Support found within foster care community to empower new role of a foster parent

“I'm divorced 20 years married with three kids and foster but so I'm just doing this on my own with them but as far as you know I mean everything falls apart except the foster care group. You don't mean for it to be that way, so that group became so important”

Shift in roles

“I'd bring boxes home with to build something in the living room, I would turn my house to forts. We were crazy with big forts, and they would help me instead. And then they would go home, and I would take a week to recover because we were just grandparents and then the transition for them was, we were no longer fun grandparents that we're mom and dad and there were rules to follow.”

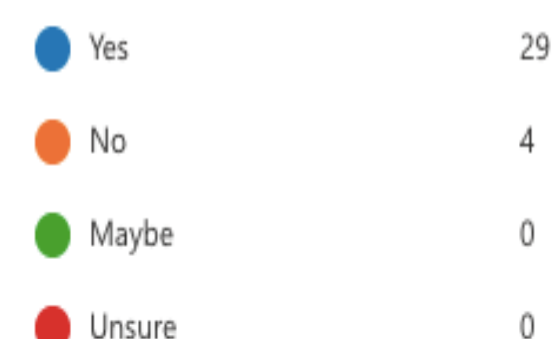
When fostering, were there roles that were affected or changed? (Example: A role may be a mother, father, friend or caregiver?)

[More Details](#)



When fostering, were there routines that were affected or changed? (Example: A routine may be a morning walk or game night every Monday)

[More Details](#)



DISCUSSION

This study allowed for insight into current and changing roles and routines for first-time foster parents. The results from this study allowed for further comprehension on how roles and routines were impacted, and that education and tools can be used to help decrease disruption to these domains. Understanding that taking on a new role as a foster parent means routines will be impacted in one way or another. Through education on resources and support available as well data from interviews and surveys may help to decrease such disruption and allow for roles and routines to be established, preserved and maintained to improve the transition and overall quality of life.

Dissemination: Data collected from surveys and interviews was organized and analyzed and from there a binder was created including education on roles and routines, tips for establishing, preserving and maintaining, various resources available to population as well as advice and challenges faced from experienced foster parents. The binder is available to view and download on www.fakce.org.