



“Burnout” is something that some resource parents may experience. In the next few newsletters, we’d like to share some information on burnout with you, and hopefully offer some suggestions to anyone that might need help identifying or addressing it. The following information is taken from the book *Burnout Protection: Survival Handbook for Foster Parents and Social Workers*, Susan Meltsner, MSW, Author; Jacob R. Sprouse, Jr., Editor

“Role and relationship demands are directly related to the day to day work done by foster parents. These involve the torture of fitting all that has to be done into the time available: the emotional involvement that accompanies caring for another human being; and the difficulty in seeing the tangible results of foster care or receiving appreciation for what has been done...”

“**Time:** Foster parents, like the rest of the human race, must schedule themselves with a 24-hour day in mind. Foster parents, like those of us with overwhelming demands to meet, could often use an extra hour or two with which to work...”

“The second area of role and relationship demand is referred to as the “helper trap.” Helping professionals, including foster parents, are required by the very nature of their work to constantly come face to face with their own and others’ emotions....more often than not, the unpleasant ones. Unlike other kinds of work, the helping professions and foster care require ever-present openness, empathy, and understanding. As a foster parent you are called upon to continually be aware of feelings and behaviors and their meanings. No matter what happens, there is the demand to react in a helpful manner.”

“A helping professional is always giving. They must often swallow their own feelings in the best interest of the people they are trying to help. How clearly this demand can be seen in foster parents. With reunification of birth families as its goal, foster care requires that you contend with a child who may have been bruised, battered and emotionally damaged by his parents, yet take care not to express anger or hostility toward the parent who has inflicted such pain. You must remain conscious of the detrimental effect of “bad mouthing” a parent in front of a child.”

“And how difficult it is to see not one but many children in such a state in the first place. One of the primary stressors for helping professionals is the demand to see and take on other people’s pain, anger, and hostility. Many of these negative feelings may be directed at the helping professional who is a safe target or who is keeping them from getting something they want. To remain effective the helping professional must try to truly understand and empathize. With so much to absorb, it is not surprising that people who have been helping others for a significant period of time find ways to distance and protect themselves even though this survival mechanism may decrease their effectiveness. “

“Foster care involves a unique emotional demand, the demand to allow a child whom you have loved and nurtured and watched grow, to leave your home and your life. Loss or permanent separation from a loved one is considered to be one of the most stressful events or conditions with which anyone must cope. Yet foster parents are asked to cope with such separation on a regular basis. Their natural emotional reactions to this event make others uncomfortable and are generally dealt with inadequately by those who could be supportive. No one can effectively teach a foster parent to cope with separation before they actually experience it. I am told it gets easier after the first time. And maybe it does. Regardless it remains a major emotional stress that will always come with the territory.”