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# THE ROLE OF FOSTER FAMILY IN CORRECTING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DEFICIT: A CASE REPORT OF AN ORPHANED TEENAGER

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## Abstract

Parenting styles substantially affect children's behavior. Uninvolved parenting style can extensively impact children's development progress. This case study aims to investigate the role of a foster family in promoting social development and correcting the deficits of an adopted child from Uninvolved parenting care. The study used qualitative research methods. Four research tools were used, including a series of interviews and questionnaires for pre-adopted and after 4 years of adoption, both from the foster family and adopted child side. The sample group consists of 1 adopted child and 2 foster family members. The result shows that the foster family significantly improves the social development of the child raised neglected during their early childhood through their 4 training approaches. These approaches include strengthening relationships, encouraging empathy with others, promoting assertiveness and emphasizing respect for rules and social regulations. By strengthening the relationships, this 6-year-old child who showed no trust and isolated himself from unfamiliar persons can gradually build relationships with others and adapt to his peer groups. Learning empathy for others changes him from being a possessive child to being a shared with empathy child. The role of assertiveness training encourages him to speak out, be confident to express his feelings and even offer to help others. Teaching him to respect social rules and regulations made him aware of discipline and grow up happily as part of society.

**Keywords:** Foster Family, Social Development Deficit, Orphaned Teenager, Case Study

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## Introduction

Family plays a crucial role in children's development and preparation for life in society. It is the first line to protect and shape their personality, including instilling morals, ethics, values and cultures of each society to its members. (Sukadaeche, 2020) According to Freud's theory, personality is based on childhood experiences and how the family deals with each developmental stage. The improper parenting will cause trauma to the children. Therefore, by raising the children appropriately, they will grow up with goals in life and be well-adapted to others (Yanwaree, 2002) Children's first relationships are with their parents. A strong bond was formed and this will influence the way they view themselves and others. Strong parent-child relationships help children develop a sense of security. The quality of these close relationships will affect the child's ability to form and maintain relationships while they grow up. (Simpson & Rholes, 2010) These influences are not only the genes inherited biologically, but also the behaviors, habits, beliefs and values that we learn from our caregivers. In a healthy parent-child relationship, the parent provides physical shelter, emotional support, and financial security for their heir.

Unfortunately, in a drug-addicted family, parents may not be able to do their roles. Peaceful, loving homes can be shattered by the strain caused by drug abuse. Conflict becomes normal as family members fight, trust begins to erode and marriages can end. The situation may lead to physical and mental violence or neglect. (American Addiction Centers, 2022)

Neglectful or Uninvolved parent shows low interest in their children's needs and overall well-being. They might provide the bare minimum the child needs for survival, absence of affection, support, guidance and responsiveness, leaving the child feeling unloved, neglected, and disconnected from their parent. Since the parent does not set boundaries or discipline for their children, they are not able to understand the difference between good and bad behavior. Consequently, they may not be aware that their behavior might hurt others around them. (Dhaliwal, 2018) Neglectful parenting style can result from parental stress, mental illness, and substance abuse. Parents who are experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression may struggle to provide the necessary care and attention for their children's needs. Substance abuse can also interfere with effective parenting, as they may still struggle with their own addiction problem and not focus on their children's needs.

Young children who experience prolonged periods of neglect can have significant long-term effects on a child's development. The children may feel worthless, not trusting others, antisocial, unfamiliar with rules and regulations and lack social skills, making it challenging to socialize. (Center for the Protection of Children's Rights Foundation, 2022) Uninvolved parenting could leave a lasting mark on a child. The parent who shows an uninvolved parenting style were often raised by uninvolved and dismissive parent. As adults, they may find themselves repeating the same patterns they were raised with. (Right for Education Foundation, 2022)

While attachments to their parents are primary, young children can also benefit significantly from relationships with other responsive caregivers both within and outside the family. (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016) Therefore, if the family cannot perform their duties, the children must have some alternative care, such as foster or kinship care to protect and promote child development in all aspects appropriately. (Lovecarestation, 2016) This alternative care will bring the opportunity for children to be loved, warm, cared and serviced like other children.

This study aims to investigate the role of the foster family in promoting social development and correcting the social development deficit of an orphaned child who was abandoned during their first 6 years of childhood and raised by an un-involved parent. By exploring the improvement of the social development in the child under a foster family 4 training approaches,

we expected to gain an understanding and guidelines for troubleshooting the raising of neglected children by the foster family.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Participants**

A Single case study design using qualitative methods was applied in collecting and analyzing data. A case was Boy A (pseudonym), a 10-year-old, single child who lived with his drug-addicted father and a grandfather who earned a family living. The child grew up approximately first 2 years in his father and mother's care, after the divorce, he was under his father's care. Since the father did not care about his son, Boy A grew up neglected, not given well-hygiene; baths and clean clothes, malnourishment, no proper training; table manners, excretion and no medical care. Finally, Boy A was adopted by a foster family when he was 6 years old. The social development data were collected from Boy A and two foster family members: a 58-year-old stepmother and a 22-year-old stepsister, 4 years after he was adopted by a foster family.

### **Measure, Method and Data Collection**

The method and measures used in this study were: (a) 2 customized interview forms on a child's social development for Boy A and the foster family. Content analysis questions were reviewed by three psychologists and (b) 2 questionnaires from the Buriram Provincial Social Development and Human Security Office on the Examination of the foster family's care to meet the minimum child-rearing standards (Boonpok, 2015). The latter questionnaire includes a 45-item physical and mental health check-up with a Cronbach's Alpha at 0.94 for Boy A and a 36-item questionnaire with a Cronbach's Alpha at 0.97 for the foster family members. Due to the spread of the COVID-19 situation and healthcare concerns, the study was conducted online during the middle of 2022. Triangulation was applied to verify the collected data, and content analysis was used to extract information.

### **Ethics Consideration**

This study was approved by the Psychology Department, Education Faculty of Silapakorn University. Permission from the sample group, including the foster family members and Boy A, has been obtained. All information is presented in an overview for educational purposes only.

## **Research Findings**

### **A Child's Developmental Consideration Before Adaptation**

Initially, when Boy A joined the family, he showed no trust in others, feared unfamiliar persons, spokeless, was not aware of proper etiquette, such as table manners, or socialization with others and had difficulty following family or school rules. He also showed strongly possessive behavior due to his inherent fears from his past experience, growing scarce. Notably, Boy A was not diagnosed to have any psychotic symptoms by a psychiatrist. Therefore, it was observed that Boy A had behavioral problems with social development because of inadequate caring, not biological factors.

### **Important Roles of Foster Family in Promoting Social Development**

Strengthening relationships: Started by promoting family relationships, in day one, all of the foster family members introduced themselves and gave a warm welcome to the new member. The child had a private area and could freely use the family's shared area. He was invited to join family activities such as drawing and playing badminton, as he felt comfortable. They also taught Boy A to socialize and gradually build relationships with other children and non-family members through playing and his favorite hobby.

The questionnaire result shows that the foster family successfully builds positive relationships with the child. The score from the foster family was ranked at the highest level in emotional caring and teaching children to manage their emotions ( $M = 4.83$ ), building trust and a sense

of security in the family life and environment ( $M = 4.85$ ) and high level in promoting social skills and community's activities engagement ( $M = 3.50$ ). Questionnaire results from Boy A showed the highest score in 3 dimensions; appropriate emotional control ( $M = 5.00$ ), well-being, self-caring, self-control ( $M = 4.50$ ), relationships within the family and surrounding people ( $M = 5.00$ ). It was evident that given the warm loving, responsive interactions, spending quality time and building trust by the foster family, Boy A can adapt to get along well with others.

**Encouraging empathy:** The approach was done by giving Boy A the reasons and demonstrating them in daily life situations. It started with asking him to help family members did the housework and finally took responsibility for his assignment duties. The next step was to be generous to others, non-family members. For example, he should assist the younger child, be aware of the others' feelings; imagine what it might be like if he is in their position. Praised empathetic behavior when he showed empathy for others. With these approaches, Boy A gradually understood, practiced well and eventually developed a sense of compassion that guided him to properly respond to the one who made a mistake. Presently, Boy A is willing to share his favorite food with friends, learns to help others and learns to manage his emotions in a healthy way through discussion and reflection.

**Promoting assertiveness:** Initially the child was hesitant to speak out, answer the questions and never ask for help. The foster family started by listening when he tried to communicate, observed and offered him their help. Then they gradually encouraged him to speak up, asking for what he wanted and making him believe that his opinions counted. When his fear of a negative consequence from past experiences was reduced, the child started to communicate with them then they started to ask the child to join the activities with the family, such as playing games, dancing and singing. He was asked to make his own decisions, starting from the easy ones, such as what to wear or which song he wanted to sing or dance. They taught him how to stand up for himself with respect others, both at home and school. Even if his decision or answer was not right, the family showed appreciation and taught him that it's OK to fail, learn from it and try again. In grade 3, he was elected to be the Deputy head of his classroom. Presently, he is proud to help his stepmother welcome the customers in her barber shop.

The questionnaire result revealed that the foster family successfully improved Boy A confidence and assertiveness. The score from the child was ranked at the highest level in self-identity, self-esteem and self-confidence ( $M = 4.63$ ). These were consistent with the interview result which shows that the foster family played a massive role in coaching the child's proper sense of self. At present, Boy A can express his opinions and feelings, feel confident and secure, understand his capabilities and experience a feeling of accomplishment.

**Emphasizing respect for rules and social regulations:** The training started by emphasizing discipline at home. They explain to the child the home's rules and why it is important for him to obey the rules. They also set an agreement with the child of consequences for misbehavior such as reminding, warning and punishing by not allowing him to watch the cartoons on TV. On the positive side, he was praised every time he obeyed the rules. After he was accustomed to following the home rules, they started to emphasize the school and social rules in the same way. On respecting others, the foster family taught about gratitude such as gratitude to their biological mother and father, how to behave with teachers and friends, how to talk politely, and how to "Wai" with respect. The foster family also demonstrated appropriate manners to him.

The questionnaire result indicated that the foster family successfully improved Boy A respect for rules and social regulations. The score from the foster family was ranked at the highest level in training the child's ethics and discipline ( $M = 4.83$ ). The score was at a high level in understanding the individual boundary and respecting others ( $M = 4.13$ ). The score from Boy A was ranked at the highest level in 2 dimensions of parental training which are self-learning,

ethics and discipline understanding ( $M = 5.00$ ), appropriate expression and rules compliance ( $M = 5.00$ ). The mentioned results were consistent with the interview. It showed that this family played an essential role in training the child to respect the rules at home, at school and in the community. Boy A understood his assignment role and responsibility and demonstrated a good manner in society.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Boy A who was raised by a single drug-addicted father, a divorced family and neglected caring grew up his first 6 years untrained and felt insecure. Align with Erikson's Theory of Development (Kanchanakorn, 2021), wherein the first stage, Trust vs. Mistrust, needs a guardian for security and care. Without continued care, children will be distrustful, paranoid and anxious. As a result, children are insecure about their status or their abilities. In addition, children raised in the Uninvolved Parenting Style will not be able to adapt and build relationships with others or live with people in society typically (Maccoby & Martin, 1983 cited in Meesomsarn, 2001). Moreover, in a healthy parent-child relationship, the parent takes the role of the caregiver, providing physical shelter, emotional support, and financial security for a young person who is still developing. In parent-child relationships that involve drug abuse, these roles are often reversed, and the child assumes the role of the caregiver. Many children are not even aware that they have taken on this responsibility (American Addiction Centers, 2022). Freud (1905 cited in Mcleod, 2023) suggested that infants become attached to the source of pleasure. Infants, who are in the oral stage of development, become attached to their mothers because they fulfill their oral needs. Bowlby (1982 cited in Cherry, 2023) described the behavioral theories of attachment that attachment was a learned process and that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with caregivers. In an Avoidant attachment style, children tend to avoid parents or caregivers. Children who are punished for relying on a caregiver will learn to avoid seeking help in the future. As mentioned, Boy A exhibited low trust in others, low self-esteem, was always condemned whenever he did something wrong, lived in fear of physical punishment, refused to get help when he needed and was not aware of social etiquette. It takes 4 years for the foster family to gradually train and get the improvement.

The foster family step by step built the relationship and tried to get acquainted by introducing family members and letting the child do activities with family members. While the trust was built, they taught the child to extend his relationships to outsiders. This finding was consistent with the family and the child questionnaire results. The score from the foster family was ranked at the highest level in building trust and a sense of security. While questionnaire results from Boy A showed the highest score in well-being, self-caring and relationships within the family. The foster family also used activities as a tool for this step. The study from Chewae (Chewae, 2021) found that play is essential for early childhood and elementary school children, if parents allow their children to play, it will strengthen family relationships. It will encourage children to have social development adaptation, preventing emotional issues and building relationships with others. The foster family encourages Boy A to build relationships and adapt himself to others through games and activities. This finding is consistent with the questionnaire results for children regarding relationship building. The score from the foster family was ranked at the highest level in emotional caring, teaching children to manage their emotions. While questionnaire result from Boy A showed the highest score in appropriate emotional control, self-control and relationships with surrounding people.

Fostering empathetic awareness in Boy A, in the beginning, the child was immensely possessive of food and things. He was very unhappy to share anything with others. This point is consistent with Freud's Psychosexual Theory (Mcleod, 2023). In the Anal stage, between 1-3.5 years of age, the child is happy to defecate or inhibit excretion. Adults should therefore pay attention to

the training of children's bowel movements at the right time and in the right place. If the training does not go well or are not adequately trained, this will cause anxiety, may become a destructive, unorganized and untidy person or on the other side, disorganized worry and not share. This foster family encourages the child to learn and practice sharing by talking about why sharing is good for him and listening to him on why it was uncomfortable for him to share. They started by asking the child to play and share his toy with the family members, then step up to share and play with other children. Through all the steps, when the child tried to share they gave the child plenty of praise and attention. They also demonstrate, as the normal family practice, that when members buy something, they will share it. The foster family asked the child to help with the housework and support him to cope with disappointment, compromise and fairness. They taught Boy A to be considerate and mindful of others. It aligns with the study that one way to help teach the child to share is by teaching him to think about others' feelings. (Limtrakul, 2020) From adopting him until age 8 years old, the family made the simple meaning of consideration by asking the child to imagine how others would feel or think in that situation. Currently, they move forward teaching Boy A to empathize even with others who did something wrong, not behave, not share, not help. These align with research that through family-based upbringing and an environment for children to learn the thoughts of others, coexistence behavior towards others, and being part that plays a role in understanding other people's feelings help the child reduce self-centric and develop the ability to understand others' feelings (Matayarak & Chaiphan, 2013)

Without proper caring and training in his early childhood, Boy A at 6 years old has an issue with assertiveness and self-esteem. He was quiet and hesitated to ask for help from anyone. He avoided disagreement since fear of a negative consequence. The behavior aligns with Erickson's Psychosocial Theory (Rakkarn, 2018). In the second stage; 1.5-3 years old, Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, children will be able to control their movements and they want to be themselves. If his parents neglected, scolded or were too strict, will cause children to be ashamed or unsure of themselves. In step 3; 3-6 years old, Initiative vs. Guilt, children begin to have curiosity and initiative. If the family does not support or not supervise at an appropriate level, children will develop guilt about their needs and desires. This family started coaching him by encouraging him to speak loudly, pay attention to what he said and set the ground rule that no penalty for any question, opinion or asking. Followed by encouraging him to do activities that promote assertiveness, such as dancing, singing, or having them recite the mathematics multiplication table, appreciating when he got a good score at school. When the child felt comfortable and confident then extended to the outsiders. This is consistent with Niyomthat's research that children who participated in singing, playing, and dancing activities had higher assertiveness because the activity stimulated, emphasized and encouraged children to express their talents, thoughts, imaginations and actions (Niyomthat's, 2021). Boy A was assigned to welcome guests in his stepmother's shop and at school he is not hesitant to raise his hand whenever he has an answer or opinion. He is learning to lead the group and recently was elected to be the Deputy head of his classroom. By supporting him in activities and guiding him to succeed step by step, it boosted his confidence and self-esteem, now he feels capable, valued and worthwhile. This point is consistent with the child's questionnaire score regarding assertiveness and self-esteem.

Ngammana mentions in his article that respect for rule and social regulation is important, disregarding this action may impact the child's future lifestyle; for example, children may have bad behavior and crime problems. (Ngammana, 1975). It should be noted here that there is a combination of not respecting the rules and social regulations in Boy A. He was misbehaved since he was not aware of the rules and never got an explanation of the purpose of the rules. The foster family started talking with him about the home rules that all members were following and why they had those rules in place. Family needs rules to control the practices of

family members within an appropriate range, such as setting a daily schedule. All rules should be clearly defined, and logical and not keep changing, reasonable and compromise (Jaicharoen, 2009). They also encouraged him the family's ground rule that no penalty for asking questions or expressing his opinion of the rules. The family has clearly defined roles and responsibilities that Boy A can understand and act accordingly. He also got assignments to support housework, like other members, such as setting up the table and feeding the pet. Initially, they ensured that he followed those home rules and his housework assignment well. Further step, they discussed with the boy of school rules, such as being punctual, wearing proper uniforms and following classroom and library etiquette. If the boy did not follow the rules or do his assignments, members would start with talking, urging, reminding then warning and the last stage punishing him by skipping watching cartoons on TV. On the other hand, they will praise or reward his good behavior. According to Skinner's theory of operating conditions (Boonsupa, 2021), punishment results in reducing or stopping the behavior. The family chooses to use nonviolent or mind-affecting punishment methods. This action is consistent with John Locke said in the Best Reward and Punishment (Kaochim, 2008) that physical punishment is an invalid method; if no one looks after children, they will do it again, and physical punishment may harm children's psychology, causing confusion and drowsiness. Just the same way, they taught the child to obey the school rules, if he did not obey them, there would be consequences and the teacher may punish him, according to the school rules. It conforms to Gutter's direct teaching model (Ratanathong, 2013) in the behavior change process. When the teacher determines what the child is learning or needs by learning step as follow; 1) Have a good and correct example so children can learn from teachers' observation and imitation. 2) Practice supervised and assisted by teachers. 3) When the exercise is correct, students must practice alone. 4) Provide feedback or return information to correct. This case study reveals that even teaching the child to be respectful was a long process, but with patience, listening, understanding, and clearly setting up the expectations the family can help raise well-mannered, responsible and respectful child who are confident and curious. This finding is consistent with the survey results of the family on respect for rules, morality, emotional control, good behavior, building understanding and respect for others, and his and others' rights. Boy A showed respect for the rules and had a sense of responsibility and social etiquette. For example, he will end this sentence politely, greeting others when met and have good table manners. This point is consistent with the survey results on children's respect for social norms that the child can learn to adopt and understand the social context, ethics, morality, status and abide by social rules.

Research from Haward Graduate School of Education in Human Development clearly shows that the seeds of empathy, caring, and compassion are present from early in life, but to become caring, ethical people, children need adults to help them at every stage of childhood to nurture these seeds into full development. We should work to cultivate children's concern for others because it's fundamentally the right thing to do, and also because when children can empathize with and take responsibility for others, they're likely to be happier and more successful. They'll have better relationships their entire lives, and strong relationships are a key ingredient of happiness. In today's workplace, success often depends on collaborating effectively with others, and children who are empathetic and socially aware are also better collaborators (Haward Graduate School of Education in Human Development, 2022).

Unfortunately, Boy A raised inadequacy of affection, support, and guidance from Uninvolved parenting style. As a result, he grew up with negative behaviors, low self-esteem, lack of emotional skills, relationship difficulties and poor coping skills, he needed alternative help. The foster family played a vital role in supporting him during that difficult time. Referring to Freud's Psychosexual development theory and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, the first 6 years is a meaningful time when the foundations for learning, health and behavior are laid down. Boy A missed that part of his childhood and the study reveals that it is never too

late to make things right. The study also demonstrates that warmth, affection, respect and caring are essential to correct and improve the child's Social Development.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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