



Kinship Quarterly

Strengthening Families

Jan 2016

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The STAR Health program helps more than 30,000 children and youth in foster care. Since 2008, Superior HealthPlan (Superior) has been the only provider of health care to children in foster care in Texas. Superior works with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to help kids and young adults get access to the health care they need to get well and stay well. This includes regular checkups, behavioral health care and even online tools for caregivers.



STAR Health focuses on three key areas to provide members with quality health care:

An Integrated Medical Home. This means each child in foster care gets many benefits and services. These include access to Primary Care Providers (PCPs), behavioral health doctors, specialists and dental and vision services.

Care Coordination. This helps members and caregivers understand benefits, get help with

appointments and transportation, and find resources in their area.

Training Programs. These help families, caregivers, caseworkers and other child advocates learn about health care.

Superior's dedication to these areas is supported by the many benefits and services children and youth in foster care can get. Some of these are:

Preventive health. This includes regular checkups and immunizations, office visits, dental checkups and visits to the eye doctor.

Behavioral health care. Members can get services for emotional, behavioral or developmental health.

Hospital coverage. This means inpatient services such as going to the hospital and surgeries.

Prescriptions and medical supplies. Drugs prescribed by a doctor as well as medical supplies such as glucose strips and bandages.

Case Management and Service Coordination. These programs allow youth in foster care and their caregivers talk to Superior employees who can help them get the support they need.

Nurse Advice Line. Superior has nurses who can answer health questions. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and speak both English and Spanish.

Telemedicine. Providers will meet with caregivers using teleconferences.

Health Passport. This is an online tool that offers caregivers access to health information for children in foster care.

While many children in foster care are younger than 18, there is still support through STAR Health for those aging out of the foster care system. The Transitioning Youth Program helps Superior members get the same great health care through their 20th birthday. Plus, the adolescent to Adult (a2A) program offers extra support to these young adults. This includes rewards dollars for going to health checkups.



All Superior members can also find other great services online. This includes the new Find a Doctor tool, which is an easy way to

search through the more than 59,000 Primary Care Providers, specialists, clinics and hospitals in the Superior network. There are also several trainings online for caregivers and other child advocates. These can help support children and youth in foster care.

To learn more about Superior HealthPlan's STAR Health program, please call (866) 912-6283 or visit www.FosterCareTX.com.

Good to Know



Challenging behavior rears its head in many ways. Screaming, throwing things, biting, head banging, pinching, and refusal to do daily activities are just a few examples of challenging behavior one might be dealing with. One of the best ways to deal with negative behaviors is to implement strategies before your child has lost control to help guide better behavior and prevent challenging behavior. Use these strategies regularly to help set routines and let your child know what to expect.

Maintain routines. Having general routines helps you and your child know what to expect from your day. Routines also give children a sense of comfort and stability and can be a great time to reconnect with your child (for instance making snuggling part of the bedtime routine). Look at routines from a daily perspective. For instance, waking up, getting ready for school, going to school, going to physical therapy, coming home and eating dinner, having quiet time, and going to bed. Routines can also be broken down into smaller segments, such as, getting ready for school might consist of getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, combing hair, and gathering resources for school. If there is going to be a change in routine, which is inevitable, letting your child know in advance, when possible, can help her cope with the change. This can be done by talking about the change or showing a visual to illustrate the change, for example, showing a picture of grandma and talking about her coming to visit before she arrives. Routines should be

specific to your child's and family's individual needs.

Use transition warnings. Plan your schedule to build time into your activities for transitioning to decrease challenging behavior. Many children have a difficult time stopping their activities to move on to another one, especially if they don't feel like they are done with the activity. Let your child know it's almost time to stop and move on to the next activity. Sometimes it helps to use a visual from the next activity to show what is next. For example, as you transition to another activity, you may give your child a familiar bath toy for bath time or a plate for mealtime. Give your child time for an activity to wind down or allow them to finish an activity, if possible. It can be helpful to have a basket for "in progress activities" to put things in if your child isn't finished, but remember to consistently come back to the basket and activity for this strategy to work.

Try to avoid challenging situations. Plan your day and activities to occur when your child is not hungry, tired, or overwhelmed. This strategy seems pretty obvious, but as adults, we have a lot to accomplish and we sometimes wonder if we can fit in one more activity or errand, and sometimes the answer is no (not peacefully at least)! The answer, alternatively, could be that the extra errand or activity can come after a snack, a nap, or a sensory break where your child can get away from the noise, lights, and activities to recharge.



Learn your child's cues for needing help. Kids often give us behavioral cues before they lose control and engage in challenging behavior. Common cues are whining, rocking, getting louder, and becoming tense. If you are fortunate enough to receive these cues, you have an opportunity to intervene by talking softly to your child, showing empathy, offering a suggestion of what they can do with their feelings, implementing a sensory calming strategy, or changing the environment if possible.

Use clear language to direct your child. One of the best ways to see a decrease in challenging behavior is to teach better behavior. A way to do this is to tell your child what behavior you would like to see. Instead of "don't bite your arm" you can say "if you need to bite, use your chew tube."

A more positive way to say "don't hit" could be "use your words/signs/communication device to let me know what you need." You could also show a child what better behavior would look like by modeling the behavior yourself, using stuffed animals or puppets to act out the behavior, or reading children's books about behavior together.

Reinforce positive behavior. Children will continue to do what is reinforced. If they are able to get what they want using negative behavior, they will continue to use that behavior. For example, if screaming in the store results in getting candy or a toy so he'll be quiet, the screaming will continue. If asking nicely results in a treat, you are more likely to see him use his words to ask for things he wants. It is often easier to give the negative behavior more attention because it's more noticeable, so it takes effort to catch the good behavior. If you have made suggestions on a better way she can get what she wants, make sure this new, more positive behavior works and that you make efforts to notice the new behavior or your child will decide the negative behavior is more effective! Try to notice when your child does something nice or handles her frustration well and tell her how proud you are of her. Children love to please their parents.

Offer choices throughout the day. A great strategy for helping children feel important and independent is letting them choose items and activities in their daily lives. Even getting to choose small, seemingly irrelevant things such as water or milk, red or blue shirt, bath or books first, or which fruit to eat, can help your child feel more in control of her daily life. Feeling more in control over time can translate to better behavior. Offering choices when your child is showing signs he's about to lose control can also be helpful. Examples of some possible choices are, "I can see you are getting overwhelmed. Would you like to put your headphones on for five minutes or sit in your quiet place for five minutes?" or "I see you're having a hard time putting your shoes on. Do you want help or do you want to keep trying?" Note that in each situation, only two choices were given. It's important to keep choices to a minimum when children are upset since too many options can contribute to feeling overwhelmed.

Red flags. Below is a list of behaviors or red flags that can keep your child from learning. If they happen often, contact Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) for help with social-emotional development. To find a local ECI program in your area, call the DARS Inquiries Line at (800) 628-5115 or visit www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/searchprogram.asp.

Baby

- Does not smile, move or look at you when you talk or play with her

- Does not want to be held
- Does not make sounds by 3 months
- Does not babble by 6 months

Toddler

- Has tantrums that last 20 minutes or longer
- Breaks things on purpose
- Hurts or bites other people or himself
- Does not look at you when you call his name
- Does not play with toys
- Does not have any pretend play by 24 months
- Does not enjoy being around and watching other toddlers

- Flaps hands, rocks or sways over and over
- Does not point at objects she wants
- Has no words by 12 months

At any age

- Is fussy or cries a lot, even when not tired or hungry
- Has trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Does not notice people
- Is unhappy most of the time
- Is anxious most of the time
- Any loss of speech or babbling, or social skills

10 TIPS TO HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP HEALTHY HABITS

Be a good role model – If kids see you eating right and getting physically active, they'll take notice of your efforts to send a message that good health is important.

Keep things positive – Celebrate successes and help children and teens develop a good self-image.

Get the whole family moving – Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together.

Be realistic – Setting realistic goals and limits are key to adopting new behavior. Small steps and gradual changes can make a big difference in your health over time, so start small and build up.

Limit TV, video game and computer time – These habits lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease.

Encourage physical activities that they'll really enjoy – Let your child experiment with different activities until they find something that they really love doing. They'll stick with it longer if they love it.

Pick truly rewarding rewards – Don't reward children with TV, video games, candy or snacks. Find other ways to celebrate good behavior.

Make dinnertime a family time – When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children eating the wrong foods or snacking too much. Get your kids involved in cooking and planning meals. Everyone develops good eating habits together and the quality time with the family will be an added bonus.

Make a game of reading food labels – The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat.

Stay involved – Be an advocate for healthier children. Insist on good food choices at school. Make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring cardiovascular indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol.

RESOURCES

www.facebook.com/TexasKinshipCaregivers

[Star Health](#)

www.zerotothree.org/child-development/

[Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#)
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

[Hands are Not for Hitting by Martine Agassi](#)

[Teeth are Not for Biting by Elizabeth Verdickem](#)

[TexasBenefits](#)

[AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS](#)

[CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH](#)

[AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION](#)

Kinship Worker Spotlight



Lisa Mendez, Kinship Specialist IV, has been in our program for the past four years. Ms. Mendez embodies what it means to be a dependable, accountable and responsible kinship specialist. Ms. Mendez demonstrates her passion to serving those families she comes in

contact with by ensuring she assesses the family and provides all needed services needed in a timely fashion. Her past work experience has allowed her to better assess the families she serves as well as guide and prepare those same families to providing the best quality care for our children. She identifies barriers to permanency early on and guides the family in finding solutions to these to ensure that our children have long-term homes.

Ms. Mendez takes pride in her work and has shown exemplary individual achievement, contribution, and performance in her job and other related duties. Ms. Mendez is committed to providing quality service to the caregivers and children she works with and is an asset to our program and agency. She has served as a mentor to new incoming unit members, making herself available to help those new team members fully embrace our program's mission. Ms. Mendez always accepts and carries out additional responsibilities beyond her regular job assignments for the good of our program. She has been an integral part of the Relatives As Parents group and has participated in monthly meetings and contributed to working with the RAP group to coordinate their annual caregiver conference. She strives to demonstrate a positive attitude towards all work responsibilities, to her co-workers, families she serves, as well as serves as a role model for others.

– Submitted by Erica Figueroa, CPS KIN Supervisor II, Region 6

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Quarterly**
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Families



Report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children, the elderly, or people with disabilities.

(800) 252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org