



A Foster Parent Continuing Education Course: Promoting Safe and Effective Sleep for Foster Children with Trauma

Madison Bowen, OTS; Rachel Ashcraft, MS, OTR/L, TBRI® Practitioner
Department of Occupational Therapy | University of Alabama at Birmingham
Rachel Ashcraft, MS, OTR/L, TBRI® Practitioner | Foster the Future-Alabama

Introduction

- Approximately 569,876 children were involved with America's foster care system during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.
- About 90% of those children will be exposed to some form of trauma.
- The foster youth, before entering the welfare system, are often exposed to many adverse childhood experiences.
- This, in combination with the abrupt removal from their parents' care, serves as additional trauma. As a result, the quantity and quality of sleep is negatively impacted.
- In a study on the sleep of children in care 13-17 years old, it was reported that 44% had difficulties falling and staying asleep.
- However, only 1% of educational materials for foster parents focus on sleep.
- Occupational Therapists use:
 - Knowledge of sleep physiology
 - Knowledge of sleep disorders
 - Evidence-based sleep promotion practices
- To evaluate and address the consequences of sleep difficulties on occupational performance and participation.
- The aim of this project is to address the lack of educational resources about sleep available to foster caregivers through the creation of a trauma informed, occupational therapy based, accessible, and online resource.

Methods

- The development of the content involved:
 - An extensive literature review
 - Weekly discussions with trauma informed expert/site mentor
 - Meetings with individuals at the Alabama Department of Human Resources
 - Researching the specific needs of caregivers
 - Utilizing the ASSURE instructional design model
- Once the content was developed, the three video modules were scripted, the content was filtered through the SAMHSA framework for trauma-informed care, PowerPoints were created, and the director of Foster the Future- Alabama provided feedback.
- Then, the module videos and supplemental content were filmed, edited, and posted on YouTube and Foster the Future-Alabama's website.
- After that, the quizzes for each module were developed and corresponded with the content from the paired module.
- The feedback survey was created through the Qualtrics platform.
- Finally, the 11 printable investigator-designed worksheets and certificate of completion were designed and posted to Foster the Future-Alabama's website.
- Participants were recruited through:
 - Directors in several county offices of Alabama Department of Human Resources distributing information to social workers to support the continuing education course
 - Directors of local adoption clinics
 - Foster the Future-Alabama's official social media pages
- Participants
 - Foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers who visited the Foster the Future-Alabama's website and completed all three modules to gain continuing education credit (n = 8)
- Post-participation Survey
 - Resulted in 7 responses
 - Caregivers' perspective of how useful they found the interventions, how accessible they found the course, if the information given applies to them, and if they would recommend the course to other caregivers.
 - Contained Likert-scale questions that are investigator designed and web-based

Results

- The continuing education resource is located on Foster the Future-Alabama's website and includes:
 - Three video modules
 - Module 1: "Trauma and Sleep-What Is Healthy Sleep Anyways?" (min 21.30)
 - Module 2: "Sleep and the Senses- Strategies to Create an Environment that Encourages Sleep" (min 30.56)
 - Module 3: "Increasing Independence and Confidence around Sleep through Choice" (min 28.47)
 - Four supplemental videos with detailed instruction on the topics
 - Breathing Techniques (min 2.05)
 - Social Stories (min 3.03)
 - Visual Aids for Sleep (min 1.22)
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation (min 2.37)
 - Eleven investigator made printable worksheets to facilitate the sleep strategies discussed
 - Three module quizzes- five questions each corresponding with content in each module (min ~ 15-45 min)
 - A certificate of completion



Discussion

SURVEY RESPONSES

- Caregivers reported that the course was very or extremely accessible.
- Majority of participants:
 - Found the course very useful or extremely useful
 - Found the course extremely applicable to their lives
 - Would be extremely likely to recommend the course to other caregivers
- The survey responses point to the effectiveness of:
 - Using occupational therapy techniques such as modifying the environment, addressing sensory needs and regulation, providing education, recommending equipment, and adjusting routines to aid in sleep participation and increase caregiver confidence
 - Creating a caregiver continuing education course that is located online as a free resource to address inequity

LIMITATIONS

- The course is located online, requiring internet access and/or a device on which to view the course
- The short time frame to collect information from the feedback survey
- The number of participants who completed the course
- Continuing education credit being received only after completing all three modules

Conclusion

IMPLICATIONS

- Content that is accessible and interventions that are tailored specifically to children in foster care are useful and applicable to caregivers' lives.
- Occupational therapy practitioners have the unique field of practice to address sleep difficulties in this population and to adjust current pediatric interventions to be trauma-informed.

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Create additional caregiver resources focusing on specific sleep difficulties with adapted interventions that are trauma-informed
- Evaluating the effectiveness of in-person intervention group discussing sleep
- Developing new interventions specifically for children in alternative care settings to facilitate sleep

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Suppl. 2), 7412410010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001>
- Hall Brown, T., & Garcia, E. (2020). Trauma-related sleep disturbance in youth. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 34, 128–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.01.004>
- Hash, J., Alfano, C. A., Owens, J., Littlewood, K., Day, A., Pandey, A., Ordway, M. R., & Ward, T.M. (2022). Call to action: Prioritizing sleep health among US children and youth residing in alternative care settings. *Sleep Health*, 8(1), 23 27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2021.10.002>
- Lehmann, S., Gärtner Askeland, K., & Hysing, M. (2021). Sleep among youths in foster care: Associations with potentially traumatic events, PTSD and mental health. *Child & Family Social Work*, 26(1), 111–121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12794>
- Pandey A., Littlewood K., Carter S., Rosenthal M., Bennett R., Cooper L. (2019). Thematic, content and policy analysis of sleep health promotion in social service policies impacting the most vulnerable children in the United States. *Sleep*, 9:42:A400. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/zsz067.991>
- U.S Department of Health and Human Services. (2024). *AFCARS report #30*. The Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-3>

Acknowledgement & Contact information

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Mrs. Ashcraft, MS, OTR/L, TBRI® Practitioner, Foster the Future-Alabama, Emily Delzell
CONTACT INFO: Madison Bowen: bowenm@uab.edu