

# Foster kids do much better under approach developed by CU School of Medicine

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Foster kids who receive mentoring and training in skills such as anger management, healthy communication, and problem solving are less likely to move foster homes or to be placed in a residential treatment center, and more likely to reunify with their biological families, according to a study by University of Colorado School of Medicine researchers.

Many programs nationwide have tried to help foster children achieve better placement outcomes by working with parents and making system-wide changes. This study, published in *Pediatrics*, focused on something new -- improving child well-being.

These latest results are especially powerful and promising because there are few evidence-based programs for children in foster care.

Starting in 2002, researchers evaluated what happened when foster kids, aged 9-11, in two Colorado counties, were given nine months of mentoring and skills training in areas such as feelings identification, healthy coping, and [cultural identity](#).

Results for approximately 50 children who received mentoring and skills training were compared to about the same number who received typical community and social services.

Foster children in the [prevention program](#) had 44 percent fewer placement changes and were 82 percent more likely to avoid placement

in a residential treatment center. They were also twice as likely to have reunified with their families a year after the program ended.

"Focusing on child well-being is a major push nationally within the child welfare field. This study demonstrates the positive impacts that can result from such a focus," says Heather Taussig, PhD, an associate professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the CU School of Medicine. Taussig also directs this program, called Fostering Healthy Futures, at the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect in collaboration with her child welfare partners.

"A decade of work and analysis shows that well-designed and supervised mentoring programs can be effective for high-risk youth," Taussig says. More importantly, she adds, it's an indication that children are achieving a higher quality of life. Indeed, another published finding from this study demonstrated that children who received the prevention program had fewer mental health problems and were less likely to receive therapy six months after the program ended.

The foster children in the study cannot comment because of confidentiality, but one former foster child who volunteers with this program says this kind of help is crucial.

"Foster [children](#) battle so many obstacles," says Tracy Rivera. "Anything we can do to reduce those challenges and improve emotional well being benefits them and all of us. The education and skills kids get in the Fostering Healthy Futures program is preparing them for successful lives.

"I wish I had been a part of FHF. There was not the awareness or a program like this for me when I was growing up, which made for many painful transitions and insecurities in my life as a young adult."

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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