

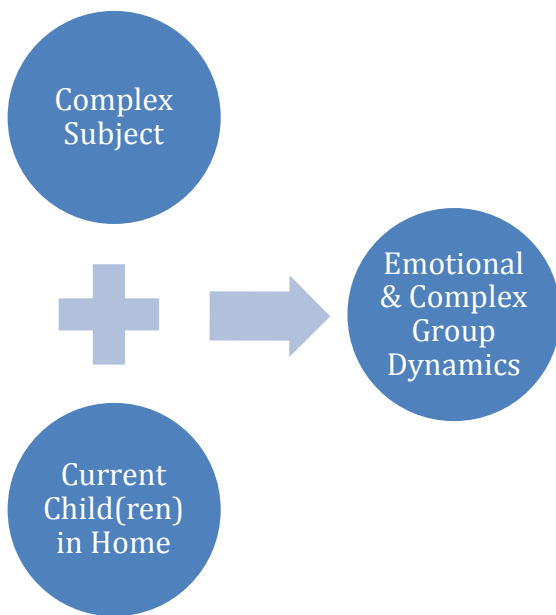
# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE IMPLEMENTING RPC

*Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents is often referred to as the Resource Parent Curriculum, or RPC. Developed by over 30 experts at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, this curriculum is uniquely designed to help therapeutic, foster, adoptive, and kinship parents (referred to as resource parents) improve their parenting skills. RPC does this by using skilled facilitators who share trauma knowledge and experience and provide parents with practical trauma-informed strategies they can immediately use with the children in their home.*

***The Resource Parent Curriculum is more than just an in-service. It addresses our fundamental beliefs about children's behaviors and can be life-changing for even the most experienced caregivers.***

## What Makes RPC So Different?

While many of the trainings that resource parents attend include some information on trauma, none have addressed it as comprehensively as RPC. Additionally, this in-service curriculum sets itself apart from other nationally available trainings for a number of reasons:



### 1.) Trauma is a Complex and Difficult Subject

This workshop extensively addresses the multifaceted aspects of trauma and focuses on the unique challenges of parenting a child who has been exposed to it. The workshop includes complex topics such as brain development and the social-emotional-neurobiological impact of trauma. Traumatic events are explored in depth, which can be difficult for participants to discuss given their emotional nature.

### 2.) Because There is a Child in the Home, Participants Discuss the Complex Issues They Currently Face

This curriculum assumes that the resource parent has completed pre-service training and currently has a child in their home. Children who have experienced trauma often have baffling behavior problems; intense emotions of anxiety, guilt and grief; and struggles with attachment. These issues can be challenging for caregivers. Throughout the workshop, caregivers participate in specific activities to be able to immediately begin applying the knowledge and skills learned with the children in their home. The facilitators discuss the participants' actual experiences each week, and use these real-life examples to reinforce concepts in the curriculum. This process, while it significantly enhances participants' learning, often creates an emotionally charged and complex group dynamic for the facilitators to manage.

## TERMINOLOGY DEFINED

Because of the complex group dynamics, the term 'facilitator' is used rather than 'trainer' because it better reflects the role of those individuals conducting the workshop.

**Staff Facilitator.** Someone who conducts RPC workshops, usually a professional in the human services field, who has the primary responsibility of coordinating all aspects of the workshop

**Co-Facilitator.** A foster, adoptive, or kinship caregiver or adult with childhood experiences in the child welfare system that conducts RPC workshops with a Staff Facilitator



## What Makes RPC So Different? (continued)

### 3.) The Participant's Experience is Often Emotionally Intense

Caregivers tend to have powerful realizations throughout the workshop which frequently result in strong emotional reactions. Common reactions include parents who express guilt over how they have parented in the past; become distressed when they realize how their actions re-traumatized a child; and reflect (perhaps for the first time) on their own traumatic past and its impact on their life and parenting style. Additionally, participants often experience a fundamental change in how they view their child's behavior, which may require modifications to their own parenting approach. Experiencing one or more of these powerful realizations can be overwhelming for the participant and requires a skilled facilitator to manage effectively in the group setting.



NCTSN developed documents that may be helpful to review prior to implementing RPC.

- Facilitator Guidelines
- Tips from Experienced Trainers
- Preparing for the Workshop Section of the RPC Facilitator Guide

These can be found at [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org).

## What Expertise Do RPC Facilitators Need?

Given the unique nature of this workshop, the selection of the facilitators is critical to successful implementation. The effective delivery of RPC requires at least two individuals: a Staff Facilitator and a Co-Facilitator. Each person brings specific experiences and expertise into the room. Some agencies utilize multiple Co-Facilitators to assist with the workshop.

The Staff Facilitator brings his or her professional training and experience in the human service industry, as well as their knowledge of the child welfare system and skills in group facilitation. It is the Staff Facilitator's role to make sure the participants feel supported and are able to share difficult emotions (e.g., guilt, anger, fear) openly. It is especially important that the Staff Facilitator has strong group facilitation skills given the complex subject matter, the real-life experiences discussed, and the intense emotions often experienced by participants.

The second, but equally important, individual leading the workshop is the Co-Facilitator who brings his or her lived experience into the room. This can be a foster, adoptive or kinship parent or an adult with childhood experiences in the child welfare system. It is the Co-Facilitator's role to share concrete examples of applying a trauma-informed perspective to their lives. Participants often report the Co-Facilitator's lived experience as having a powerful impact on their learning. The Staff Facilitator and the Co-Facilitator work together over the course of the workshop - planning and actively delivering the content of the curriculum together.

## What Characteristics Make an Effective RPC Facilitator?

Effective RPC facilitators come from all walks of life and ideally will be members of your own community. To improve the likelihood that parents will have optimal learning, effective facilitators have several key characteristics in common.

- They hold the perspective that those with lived experience (Co-Facilitators) are vital and equal partners.
- They hold a trauma-informed perspective and understand how traumatic stress symptoms can present in children.
- They are able to share examples of horrific childhood trauma in a way that participants can receive it and learn from it.
- They are able to respond effectively to the emotional responses of the participants.
- They are able to share timely, applicable, real-life examples to help participants internalize the concepts presented.
- They understand the fundamental concepts of cognitive-behavioral therapy and trauma-informed behavior management.
- They possess a working knowledge of the child welfare system and have experience working with traumatized children.
- They are good communicators who are able to stay on agenda while conducting the workshop.
- They are able to deliver the curriculum with fidelity while adding their own style and professional experience.
- They bring authenticity, flexibility and creativity to the workshop.



## How Many Days Does It Take To Conduct RPC?

This workshop is designed to be delivered over the course of multiple weeks. The curriculum is generally delivered in 14-18 hours. Experienced facilitators agree that it should occur over a minimum of four weeks to a maximum of 16 weeks. The most common schedule is two hours over the course of eight consecutive weeks. By conducting the workshop over multiple weeks, participants are afforded opportunities to utilize trauma-informed strategies with the children in their home. This helps to facilitate optimal learning for all participants as the trauma-informed behavioral management concepts are reinforced by real-life experiences.

Many well-intended agencies wish to schedule this training over the course of two-days - a weekend, for example - in an effort to be respectful of the resource parents' time. However, given the complexity of trauma and the real-life struggles caregivers may be experiencing, conducting this workshop over the course of two days may inadvertently cause more distress for parents rather than increase their confidence in their parenting skills. Additionally, reviewing the material over the course of two days does not afford the caregiver adequate time to reflect on how the principles learned can be applied to the children in their home.

## How Much Time Will A Staff Facilitator Need To Allocate For RPC?

The time required to learn how to deliver the curriculum effectively is estimated to be between 40-90 hours depending on the training method selected and previous knowledge and experience. Please see "RPC Facilitator Training Models" for more details on becoming a facilitator. However, creating an effective RPC program requires more than training someone to deliver the content of the workshop. There are many logistical tasks that require a significant amount of time as well. These include:

- Locating appropriate training space and securing the equipment and supplies needed
- Developing and monitoring a budget for training
- Identification of a Co-Facilitator (someone with lived experience) and the development of that Co-Facilitator's skills
- Contract development and payment for the Co-Facilitator's services
- Recruiting and registering caregivers (including all correspondence and managing attendance records)
- Securing food and child care for training sessions

The workshop is typically delivered during hours convenient to caregivers which are evenings or weekends. The facilitator and their immediate supervisor will need to discuss the impact this will have on the Staff Facilitator's schedule and adjust their schedule and responsibilities accordingly. In addition to the time needed to actually facilitate the workshop, each session will require several hours to prepare effectively (even for experienced RPC facilitators). These include:

- Reviewing the content and activities each week
- Working with Co-Facilitator to determine how they will split up the material
- Discussing with Co-Facilitator the impact that week's material may have on participants and/or the group's dynamics
- Preparing materials needed for that week's module(s)

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Given the time commitment outlined above, many organizations assume the most appropriate person to conduct this workshop is their agency trainer. This may or may not be the case. While these professionals have experience training large groups, such as agency staff or foster/adoptive parents, facilitating RPC is different. Given its complexities, RPC is most effective when those leading the workshop have group facilitation skills similar to those required in group therapy. Any individual without such skills are encouraged to connect with an RPC Master Trainer for further professional development opportunities.



## How Do I Get Parents to Attend?

The best recruitment strategy for RPC is word of mouth from prior participants or professionals; many participants across the country report that RPC is the most powerful training they have ever experienced and have taken the workshop multiple times. Participants may not be convinced to attend based on written materials alone (e.g., flyers), but rather by the enthusiasm conveyed to them individually by a trusted professional or personal contact. Therefore, agencies implementing RPC should engage active members from their local foster or adoptive community and child serving agencies, including the social service agency, NCTSN site, private child placing agencies, foster/adoptive support networks, as stakeholders in their RPC program.

Stakeholders will improve recruitment with more exposure to RPC; they can attend workshops, learn about it through presentations to their organizations' meetings, and stay informed about ongoing workshops through emails and flyers. Agencies implementing RPC are encouraged to communicate specific benefits of RPC to each of their stakeholders, for example, communicating to child welfare that the workshop could improve placement stability and foster parents' willingness to care for children with severe behavior problems; and communicating to foster/adoptive parent support groups or associations that the workshops are empowering and supportive and provide parents with strategies that help children heal from the effects of trauma.

Typically after caregivers come to the first session, they see its value and attend the majority of the remaining sessions. Agencies may also enhance the workshop completion rate by offering make-up sessions and providing food and child care. Lastly, skilled facilitators who are welcoming, up-beat, and can connect with the caregivers are likely to enhance the workshop completion rate.

## Can This Be Pre-Service Training?

RPC was developed to be an in-service training because each module includes activities applied to a selected child in the caregiver's home. Nevertheless, learning about the impact of trauma before a child is placed can better prepare a caregiver to successfully parent a traumatized child. Therefore, caregivers will benefit from taking RPC at the pre-service level; however, completing RPC at the pre-service level should not be a replacement for caregivers receiving the workshop when they have a child in their home.

## How Do I Find a Co-Facilitator?

Agencies currently working with resource parents should identify one or more that are 'opinion leaders' or active in their foster care/adoption community. Agencies without access to resource parents should partner with their local social services agency, private child placing agencies, foster care alumni associations, and/or post adoption resources to help identify someone with lived experience.

The identified person should observe the entire workshop prior to serving in the co-facilitator role, or in the event that is not possible, be exposed to the curriculum on an individual basis by the Staff Facilitator. Further recruitment of co-facilitators comes from those parents who have taken the workshop and are excited about sharing it with others. Many agencies have several Co-Facilitators on their team.

## How Much Does RPC Cost?

The cost to implement RPC will vary significantly depending on available resources. Some agencies are able to provide child care and meals for example, while others are not. The following budget considerations should be explored prior to implementing RPC.

Approximate costs based on 15 people in the group:

- Training Space Rental Cost (varies)
- Computer and LCD Projector (\$1,500)
- Participant Manuals (\$25.00 each)
- Activity and Training Supplies (\$50.00)
- Mileage and Travel Time (varies)
- Staff Facilitator Costs (4-8 hours per week/1 group)
- Co-Facilitator Costs (varies)
- Food and Drinks for Participants (\$800)
- Child Care (\$400)

This document compiles best practice recommendations and lessons learned by experienced RPC facilitators within the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and at the Center for Child & Family Health. This document was developed by Kelly Sullivan, Kate Murray, George Ake, Nina Kane, and Jeanne Preisler.