



## All They Need

by Jennifer Patrick, M.A.CFLE  
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*“Love is all they need.”*

*“Discipline and structure are what kids need these days.”*

*“Kids just need one person to believe in them to become successful.”*

How many times have you heard the phrases above from others? Or believed it yourself?

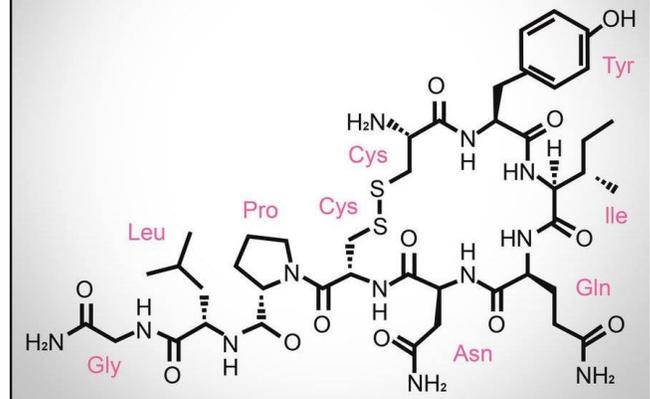
Maybe it was your strong belief in one of these phrases that inspired you to become a foster or adoptive parent. Maybe you hear one of these phrases from a well-meaning person who has no idea what challenges you and your family experience. Maybe now you know, one of these things is never enough, but you don't know what is.

The simple truth is: all of these things together are a start, but these phrases are oversimplifications and not philosophies to build lives on alone.

### LOVE

Yes...Love **is** what they need and what will keep you in it during the hard times. Love is what will help you stay in the room to make sure they don't hurt themselves or others during a rage. It will help you forgive them when they (do that thing they do) again. But is it all hugs and cuddles and good times? Not exactly, though hopefully, you will get there! It took one of our kiddos 3 years before the child looked us in the eyes and said *I love you*. Three years of doing the things you'll read in a moment. We said it all the time with no response whatsoever.

this is love.



And then one day...the child was brave enough to say the words.

Love will help you remember that they weren't loved in healthy, tangible ways that met their basic needs. This caused their brains to grow atypically, forming connections meant to cause a cycle of mistrust, rejection, hurt, and brokenness so they can continue the misery of self-survival. They desperately need your love to stop the rush of cortisol (the stress hormone) racing from their adrenal gland through their bloodstream sending them into fight, flight, freeze or flop. They need the oxytocin that your love offers. Oxytocin (known as the “love” hormone) creates social/relational bonding and is released during breastfeeding or other forms of relational intimacy. It is part of the attachment process.

**Note:** Oxytocin among other hormones such as dopamine (the happy hormone causing de-stressing and mood-boosting effects), endorphins (natural pain reliever), and others work together to increase bonding and attachment.

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## DISCIPLINE & STRUCTURE

Remember your pre-licensing training (formerly PRIDE; currently GROW): discipline is not punishment or harming in nature. Discipline is teaching in nature. Punishment is harming, shaming and restricting. The kids already had those experiences from caregivers before they came to you.

You are their new hope. You are their teacher. The kids are your students (that's what a disciple is). Responding to them in a teaching role (vs. an authoritarian role) can create a sense of "felt safety." Becoming the kids' "safe haven" will stabilize them and help them start exploring the world around them. Then, when a new lesson needs to be learned, you will bring them back to your reservoir of oxytocin and safety and teach them the better way. They go explore and come back to their safe haven to get assurance, redirection or more information for the next exploration.

Then there is **structure**. I often wonder what people mean when they say "structure". They always sound so unmoving when they say it. Confining. Restricting. Is that really what structure is?

Merriam-Webster defines structure as: the way that something is built, arranged, or organized; something that is built by putting parts together and that usually stands on its own.

That doesn't sound restricting or confining; it sounds liberating. It sounds like someone is building a space specifically for a unique individual so that the individual, in all of his or her skills, gifts, preferences and uniquely-created **self**, can live, move and experience their **being**. Eventually.

If you've ever built a tower with blocks, you soon realize that building your dream tower may be good in theory...but not in practice. You try something and see that it doesn't work. So you make necessary adjustments. Why? **Because the expectation and hope is that you are building something that can stand on its own.** You may not have anticipated needing extra supports in some places of the tower, or you have to use smaller pieces to get the desired result.

Discipline and structure...teaching and strengthening to help someone stand on his or her own. Self-efficacy. That is the goal that honors every individual. Self-efficacy is the **goal**...and the **gift**.

## JUST ONE PERSON

Well, let's just call this what it is: a nice thought, and **a little white lie**.

Our kids—all kids—need more than just one person to believe in them, though one may get the ball rolling. Our kids need a community. That's why you are sometimes exhausted; why you might feel defeated and doubtful; why you wonder if you can keep going. Because the trauma and damage they suffered was so unimaginable, even if it was at the hands of one or two people, it impacted them neurologically, spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

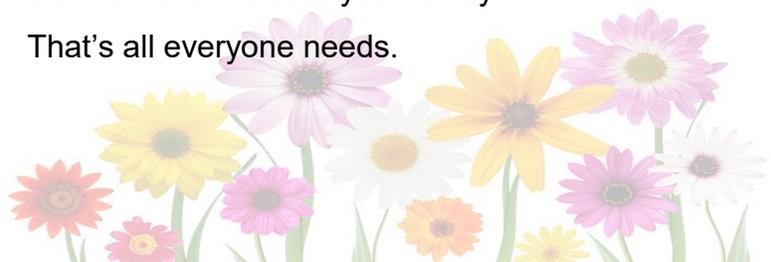
That's just the impact of trauma. Let's consider the personalities, skills, and gifts that may be different from our own. How do you parent a mathematically-minded kiddo if you failed Algebra 1? What if your kiddo is musically talented but you are sensitive to noise and can't even whistle? You're an introvert and your kiddo is an extrovert.

And here's a big one: genes and epigenetics. As adoptive parents, we don't share histories, genes, or even epigenetics (which scientists believe play a huge role in our emotions and behaviors) with our kids. They need a diverse group of people who can speak to all the various pieces of humanity that are inside them.

You can't be all they need. No one could do that for anyone.

But you can be the foundational person that provides felt safety and a route to other people, resources and supports that heal and enhance the lives of the kids in your family.

That's all everyone needs.



# Everyday Oxytocin

By Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, PhD, FAPA and Kerstin Uvnas Moberg, MD, PhD

Oxytocin drives the anti-stress response, which lowers your risk for disease. Oxytocin also helps us connect with others. Social connection lowers inflammation. Since inflammation underlies most diseases, this finding is quite significant.

Oxytocin is not just the hormone associated with childbirth, breastfeeding, and sex. There are things you can do to increase oxytocin levels in your daily life.



## Eat with People you Like

Having a pleasant meal with family or friends increases your oxytocin. It also strengthens bonds. It's no accident that celebrations all over the world involve food. Eat together and enjoy!



## Pet the Dog

When you touch an animal, you release oxytocin through the receptors on your hands. When you stroke a nice, friendly animal, you release oxytocin. A study in Sweden found that petting a dog was as effective as medications for lowering blood pressure in nursing home patients.



## Feel the Sun

Warmth releases oxytocin. Take a moment to feel the sun on your shoulders. If it's not sunny, try a hot pack on your shoulders. The heat should feel pleasant and make you relax. This can be a great way to wind up your day.



## Sing Together

A recent study in Health Psychology found that group singing releases oxytocin. Is it any wonder that singing together is often a form of worship? Is it a surprise that it makes us feel good? Even in a secular context, singing helps us relax and create something beautiful together. So, belt it out!



## Get a Massage

Wanted touch also increases oxytocin. So if you like massages, know that they are good for you. In studies where premature babies have been gently massaged, they grew faster and are more content. The same physiology applies to you too.



## Surround Yourself with Beauty

A cluttered, messy environment is stressful. Clutter often speaks to tasks that need to be done, ramping up your stress response. But simplicity and lack of clutter can have the opposite effect. Even creating small pockets of calm and order can have this effect. Feng Shui, anyone?

# PARC Events

Build connections with and get support from others who truly understand!

## Upcoming Online Trainings:

### Summer Family Conference via Zoom

May 13th, 6 - 9 p.m.

May 14th, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

## Monthly Online Support Groups:

### Fabulous Foster and Adoptive Parents

1st Monday of Each Month

6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### Adoptive Family Connections

1st Thursday of Each Month

7:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### Faithful Fathers - Dad's Only

2nd Wednesday of Each Month

9 - 10 p.m.

### Marvelous Moms - Mom's Only

3rd Thursday of Each Month

7:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### PARC at the Park

(Outdoor Gathering - in Genesee County)

4th Friday of Each Month

6 - 7 p.m.

For a complete list of events, [visit the calendar page on our website](#). Additional activities and resources are listed there as well!

[www.parc-judson.org/calendar](http://www.parc-judson.org/calendar)

For questions or to register for support groups or events, contact [parc\\_5@judsoncenter.org](mailto:parc_5@judsoncenter.org) or 734-794-2988.

## What are people saying about PARC?

"It [the Dads group] was a great way for dads to connect and see they are not the only dads out there."

"Love the people and the help I receive here!"

"These people are my tribe. This [support] group has helped me get through so many things."

"[PARC Worker] helped to keep me from jumping off the ledge many times. I never felt judged, only supported."

"My experience was wonderful, [PARC Worker] was a huge help to us. We truly appreciate all of the support!"

"[PARC Worker] has been a true blessing to our family. Their kindred spirit helped me through a difficult time."



Judson Center

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