



the home environment. The course was built with foster families in mind but is appropriate for anyone who cares for or supports a child who has experienced trauma.

The course discusses nutrition and mealtime challenges specific to children who have experienced trauma, and finally it offers guidance in addressing these challenges using trauma-informed principles.

For many children, their trauma might have been related to food, Miller said.

“We want caregivers to feel empowered,” Miller said. “There’s a whole group of kids where mealtime has become a battleground with caregivers. We want to reframe mealtime so that it’s an opportunity to connect with the child and build resilience.”

Miller’s co-instructor is Jenny Rudolph, an associate professor of practice in the OSU Extension Service Family and Community Health Program and endowed outreach coordinator for the Moore Family Center for Whole Grain Foods, Nutrition and Preventive Health in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences. Rudolph, who serves Columbia County and the Portland metro area, has more than 10 years of experience partnering with the Oregon Department of Human Services’ (DHS) local Child Welfare Office to teach nutrition and cooking classes specifically for foster families.

Like Joslin, this work is also close to Rudolph’s heart. Growing up her family fostered her four cousins who were placed in their care for many years. So, in 2019, Rudolph wrote a grant to the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) to deliver SPOON’s Nourished and Thriving toolkit in partnership with the DHS child welfare office in St. Helens. They taught four classes in 2020 before the pandemic.

The team shifted the class to an online environment “with varying degrees of success,” according to Rudolph. They received feedback from caregivers that with so much going on, it would be better if they had a class that they could take on their own time and at their own pace. With additional funding from the Columbia Pacific CCO, they were able to develop this interactive online course to better meet the needs of foster families.

The course features videos and advice from Oregon foster parents on topics including establishing trust, overcoming mealtime challenges, and helping children try new foods. Recipes and resources from OSU Extension’s [Food Hero](https://foodhero.org/) (<https://foodhero.org/>) campaign are also featured in the course to help families learn how to prepare trauma-informed meals at home.

“There are some really complicated food and nutrition issues with children in foster care,” Rudolph said. “There can be lingering issues from a child’s background that can show up in ways around the dinner table or show up in food. They may have some sensory issues going on. This

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course focuses on the importance of building trust and establishing positive relationships before you implement healthy eating interventions.”

Good nutrition is essential to helping children grow, meet milestones and heal from toxic stress. But the importance of building trust outweighs what the child currently is eating, said Joslin, who has fostered a second child for 2½ years. “Relationship comes first, and nutrition comes second,” she said.

“Helping kids develop a healthy relationship with food when they’ve experienced trauma is a long game,” she said. “What I love about this course is that it trains caregivers to understand that you can’t force healthy habits down kids’ throats and expect them to stick. You take it one day at a time and have things in your toolbox to help you integrate best practices little by little during the time in your care.”

It’s OK for a child in foster care to eat fast food initially if it’s their favorite meal, she said.

“At the very least it provides comfort for the child,” Joslin said. “A meal that provides comfort for that child when they are in crisis is one of the best things you can do for them in that moment. When foster parents hear that concept, they breathe a sigh of relief. It’s a load off their shoulders.”



Want to learn more about this topic? Explore more resources from OSU Extension: [Health Outreach \(/community-vitality/health-outreach\)](#), [Nutrition and Healthy Eating \(/families-health/nutrition\)](#), [Parenting \(/families-health/parenting\)](#).

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