Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
December 2010

Celebrating Holidays with Children You Foster

By: Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Conflicting loyalties and lost dreams often make the holidays a difficult time for children in foster care. Just as studies show that holidays are stressful times for most of us, these reactions are compounded for youth placed in your home. Here are some suggestions for the holidays.

How can my family make it easier for the children in foster care while they are in our home?

- Talk about the season ahead of time. Talk about how your family celebrates the holidays. Tell children which of the traditional holidays your house recognizes. Is it Thanksgiving? St. Nick's Day? Kwanzaa? Hanukah? Christmas? New Year? Or all of the above? Talking about the holidays gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities and ask questions.
- Help children in foster care imagine what to expect in your home. Much of what we assume to be commonplace can be new to the children you foster.
- Share the religious meanings the holidays may have for your family. Talk about your family's specific customs and activities.
- Use this time of sharing to learn especially about the religious beliefs, customs, and activities of the children you foster.
- Try to incorporate at least some of their traditions into your traditions.
- Some parents try to keep the holidays low key in order to help minimize some of the stress.

How can we work with birth families during the holidays?

- Again, ask children about their experiences and try to incorporate some of their traditions. The children placed in your home may miss some activities that they experienced with their family or in a previous placement.
- If possible, ask your child's family members about their holiday traditions and customs. Ask about their beliefs and observances. Although you may feel stretched at the holidays, try to coordinate schedules with the birth families. This gives the children a chance to share what is familiar while experiencing new traditions.
- This is a good time for the youth in your home to make small gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends.
- This is a time when many children feel conflicted feelings about their birth families and worry about them to be safe and cared for even if their family struggles. Reassure them if you can, about the safety and care of their birth family.

What are some of the ways I can help the children who I foster get through the holidays? What are some signs of grief or sadness that I can look for?

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Talk about your child's feelings throughout the season.
- Give your children time and space to grieve. Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:
    - Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally
    - Soiling themselves or bedwetting
    - Becoming withdrawn and isolated
    - Having temper tantrums
    - Being rebellious
    - Complaining more than usual
- Try to remember the developmental age of the children you foster. It will also help you to stay patient if you keep in mind the challenges of the season for your child before you react.

What are some things we can do to make family get-togethers easier?

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If you cannot get together before the big event, introduce your children to family and friends who will be at the celebration by going through pictures.
- Prepare them for the "characters" in your family and also tell them about other children who might be there.
- Tell them if your celebrations are quiet or loud, sacred or silly, big or small.
- Describe the home or place where the event will be held, and tell how it usually proceeds.
- Be realistic about it—do not make your celebrations seem perfect, but do not stress the challenges that are part of all family events.
- Give your children a camera so that they can record the celebration, and also give them one for holiday visits with their birth families.

What can I do to help my children learn what is expected of them at family celebrations?

- This is an opportunity to teach the behaviors and manners that you would like the youth you foster to learn. Go over basic manners such as "please" and "thank you."
- Explain the expectations of children prior to family get-togethers, and practice those behaviors ahead of time.
- Use role playing at home so that they can practice.
- Make sure you and your family/friends are on the same page regarding gifts from and to your children. Perhaps try to have your child bring a small hostess gift to the get together: baked goods, nuts, candles, ornament, etc.
- Tell family and friends about your children, and try to introduce them before the holidays. It's a good time to remind others about the confidentiality you honor concerning the children you foster, and it might be a good time to practice some polite but firm answers to some questions.
- Remember especially to ask your children what they would like to have shared about them.

Pre-Placement Training
for Prospective Foster Parents

No Pre-Placement Training in December

We will have two sessions for Pre-Placement training in January and February and then move to the web-based form in March. We will continue to hold one face-to-face session each month which is required.

Monday, January 10, 2011 6-9 PM
Monday, January 24, 2011 6-9 PM

All Classes are held in the Brookfield Room G137 in the Human Services Center located at 500 Riverview Avenue.

Please enter the building at door 6. Call Shari Rather at (262)548-7267 to register.

Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and Family Division

I can't believe the year is almost over and 2011 is right around the corner! As I'm finishing up my 30th year in child welfare for Waukesha County, I'd like to reflect on the changes and accomplishments during the past year. As many of you know, our staff have provided P.A.C.E., pre-placement, foundation and ongoing foster parent training for several years. We were successful in training 36 foster parents in 2010. As part of the State's Child Welfare Program Improvement Plan (PIP), all future foster parent training will be provided by the State's training partnership and not counties. So, next year, two parts of the training, foundation and ongoing, will be provided by the Southern Training Partnership out of Madison. Shari Rather will continue to provide pre-placement training for any family interested in fostering for Waukesha County. This training will be a combination of on-line training and group training. Prospective foster parents will do the on-line training then come together for one group session that will have county-specific information and the opportunity to have your questions answered. I want to thank our staff for "leading the way" in foster parent training for the past 8 years. I believe we have the most well trained foster parents in the State and a lot of that has to do with the work our Permanency Unit staff have done. So, a special thanks to Lisa Roberts, Supervisor; and Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator; and all the Permanency Unit staff for providing this foster care training.

During the year, we also sent staff and foster parents for training on the Strengthening Families Initiative and Parent Cafés. This initiative was in collaboration with the State and the Children's Trust Fund. We established a partnership with the Center for Excellence for childcare and they kindly offered their building as a "host site" for our Parent Cafés. We had four Parent Cafés at the Center for Excellence in Waukesha and were well received. The feedback that we got was very positive and encouraging so we anticipate offering 6 more cafés in 2011. We look forward to see you and other parents in Waukesha County at our upcoming Parent Cafes! By attending a parent café you earn 2 hours of on-going training credit. We are always looking for more people willing to be a host at the Cafés and plan to offer the training twice in 2011, once in February and once in June.

During the past year we implemented the level system for foster home licensing. We transitioned many of our Court Ordered Relative Placements to Level 1 licensed foster homes. Our staff worked diligently to create an internal process of doing so without disrupting the relative care placement. The training and licensing of Level 1 foster homes is provided by staff in the Child and Family Unit, Mary Alice Grosser, Supervisor with her staff, Elizabeth Sinclair and Janis Mantel-Ramos I am please to say that we're well on our way to getting everyone licensed!

During the past year we also created a committee to address the impact of trauma on child development. The Trauma Informed Care Partnership of Waukesha County was created with Lisa Roberts as a co-facilitator. We consulted with Dr. Bruce Perry, State-Department of Children and Families, Children's Trust Fund and others to create this committee. We had several presentations from community agencies about their work in trauma. Those presentation were very informative and helpful. We plan to record these presentations and put them on-line for others to view. The membership on the committee has grown to over 40 agencies and community members! We are excited about the interest in developing a "trauma informed system of care" in Waukesha County and will be updating you as we go along. We are also planning on a Trauma Informed class for our foster parents in April.

During the past year we had one social work staff change with Margaret Johnson moving to another unit and Jen Adler returning to Permanency Services. Other than that, the Permanency Services Unit is very stable. The turnover in the Permanency Services Unit is very low and the average experience for the social workers in the unit is, I would guess, over 14 years! I cannot underestimate the value and impact of having experienced and well trained staff in the unit.

During the past year we had several students in our division. We hope the experience they gained in working with us will help them in their social work career. They are: Nicole Poltrock, Lisa Havlisak, Rebecca Oblamski, Amanda Matusek, Danielle Dickey, Hannah Lippe, and Elizabeth Heinz. We wish them well as they join the social work profession!

Finally, I would like to THANK YOU and your immediate and extended family. I cannot describe how I truly feel about your willingness to open your home to our most vulnerable children. Without your help I don't know how we could do this!

I wish you and yours a Happy Holiday Season and look forward to working with you in 2011. ~Jesse

Training Offered By Waukesha County

Foundation Training Winter 2011

Saturday, January 8, 2011
Partners in Permanency 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Cultural Issues in Placement 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Thursday, January 13, 2011
Maintaining Family Connectiveness 6:15 PM - 9:15 PM

Saturday, January 22, 2011
Child Abuse Part 1 & 2 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM & 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Saturday, February 5, 2011
Impact of Trauma on Child Development 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Attachment 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Thursday, February 10, 2011
Placement and Separation 6:15 PM - 9:15 PM

Saturday, February 19, 2011
Positive Guidance and Discipline 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Effects of Fostering on the Family 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

All classes are held at:
Waukesha County Human Service Center
Brookfield Room (Enter the Agency through Door #6)
500 Riverview Avenue, Waukesha, WI
Full day classes - lunch will be served

Register online at: southernpartnership.wisc.edu

Training

Parents Place Programs
262-549-5575
www.ppacinc.org

Calming the Explosive Volcano
Thursdays, December 2, 16, January 6, 20
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
This course will teach you how to deal more effectively with angry, explosive and defiant children. You will learn what the "magic wand" of parenting is, and three specific skills for using it to calm and reduce the explosions and tantrums.

Positive Outlooks for Parents and Teens
(Separate parent and teen classes)
Mondays, December 6 - 20
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Teenagers often present parents with extraordinary challenges. This program helps to improve the quality of parent-teen interaction, giving parents sufficient skills to manage disruptive, defiant and noncompliant behaviors. In separate groups parents and teens will learn how to negotiate conflicts, resolve problems and develop more effective communication skills.

Anger in Relationships
Tuesdays, December 7 - 21
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Are you sick of all the yelling? Do your differences often escalate into anger and arguments? Change the negative patterns and replace them with kindness, respect and peace.

Love and Logic ®
Mondays, January 3 - 31
6:00 - 7:30 PM
Love and Logic is a philosophy founded by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D., and provides simple and practical techniques to help parents have less stress and more fun while raising responsible kids. This curriculum provides immediate results with techniques like: setting limits with enforceable statements, sharing control through lots of small choices, and many more.

New Strategies for the Challenging Child
Tuesdays, January 4 - 25
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Children today present greater challenge than in the past. This class will teach new and effective strategies for this challenges.

Foster Care—Training—Winter Safety Tips
By: PSG (Professional Services Group)
CIP (Community Impact Programs) Website

http://psgcip.com/FosterCare/Training/WinterSafety.php
(Hold down the CTRL Key and select the Hyperlink to take you to the website.)

To receive one training credit, please read the article below and answer the questions on the website listed above. **To receive training credit, forward completed questions to Shari Rather.**

Winter is an exciting time of year, especially when the snow first starts falling. It is also a unique time of year for families to have fun, continue holiday traditions and make new memories. However, winter can be a season for some potential safety hazards, both inside and out.

Keeping Children Warm and Safe
Dressing children in layers is the best way to protect them against cold temperatures because layers of clothing trap warm air next to the body. However, once a child is too warm, you will need to remove some of the layers, as the child will perspire and wet clothing will make it difficult for the body to maintain a normal temperature. Limit the amount of time you let your child play outside in cold weather to about thirty minutes at a time. If the temperature is below 20 degrees or if there is a wind chill advisory, you should not let your children play outside. Have your child wear a bright color when outside, so he or she can be seen by motorists. Caution your child about sliding down snow banks if they are near a street or alley.

It is also important to make sure your child is warm while waiting for the school bus or while walking to school in the winter. Being exposed to extreme cold for long periods of time can cause fatigue and increase the risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Make sure to have your children wear mittens and boots in winter to help them stay warm and dry. Again, layer whenever possible. Have him or her wear two pairs of socks under their boots and a pair of gloves under their mittens. If your child's clothing becomes wet, make sure to replace it with dry clothing. Always have your child wear a hat, and if possible, a stocking cap under the hood of their jacket when outside. People can lose up to half their body heat from their head when it is not protected against the cold. If your child will be sledding or using outdoor equipment, check their clothing for hanging drawstrings that can attach to sleds, ski lifts, or other equipment. Stuck drawstrings can cause serious injury, so remove them from hoods and necks and shorten those that hang from jacket bottoms. Use short, not long scarves, and tuck them into jackets.

Make sure while your child is playing outside that they take a break to come in and warm up and change into dry clothing. While playing, children perspire, making their clothing wet and cold. If the body temperature starts falling, it will be difficult to warm up again. Also, provide healthy meals and a lot of fluids for your children while playing outside, because they will burn more calories just to maintain a normal body temperature.

Hypothermia and Frostbite
Hypothermia is a cold weather condition caused by prolonged exposure to the cold. The body temperature drops dangerously low. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, lethargy, and rigid muscles. To bring the body temperature back to normal, you should bring the child inside and dress him or her in warm, dry clothing and cover his or her head. Give your child something warm to drink and call the doctor. If the child is unconscious, call 911 or immediately take the child to the emergency room.

Frostbite is damage to the skin due to prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures. Parts of the body most at risk for frostbite include ears, toes, fingers, and the tip of the nose. Symptoms include a burning and tingling sensation, followed by numbness. If your child develops frostbite, see a doctor immediately. Never massage, rub, or touch the affected area because the skin is easily damaged.

Outdoor Activity Safety Tips - Sledding and Skating
Most sledding accidents occur when a child on a sled runs into a car, tree, or other stationary object. You can help prevent sledding accidents by supervising your children and making sure the area they are sledding in is dafe. Many parks allow sledding and have lighted areas to use when it's dark out. Check out the hills your children will be sledding on to make sure they are not too steep and do not intersect roadways or parking lots. Always check the condition of the sled to make sure it is not broken. Make sure it has a steering mechanism and no sharp edges.

To help monitor skating safety, always check the thickness of the ice - make sure it is at least five inches think. Skating rinks are usually much safer than frozen bodies of water. Make sure the skates your children wear fit properly and have good ankle supports and sharp blades. Always carry skates to the skating area, don't wear them.

During the winter, there are extra precautions that need to be taken to insure your family is safe. Using a space heater, stove or fireplace to heat your home is very dangerous, unless properly monitored. Have your fireplace and chimney cleaned and inspected at least once every heating season and always use a screen to prevent burning pieces of wood, paper, or ashes from flying out onto your carpet. If you are using a space heater, make sure you buy an electronic model, surround it with a spark-arresting screen, and keep it at least three feet from any other objects, including curtains and furniture.

Another home hazard that concerns more often in winter months is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that can be fatal if not detected. It is usually emitted by improperly working fuel burning appliances, or water heaters and space heaters. Symptoms of CO poisoning include headaches, rosy cheeks, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and lethargy. If you think you have been exposed to CO poisoning, immediately get some fresh air. To help protect your family from the dangers of CO poisoning, install CO detectors in the bedrooms and near fuel burning appliances in your home. CO poisoning can also occur when a car is left running, especially in winter, when you are trying to keep warm.

Keeping safe in the winter requires some preparation and planning. Make sure to discuss winter hazards with your children. Be extra aware of what your children are doing during the day even if they are not with you. Talk with them about how they can stay warm, dry and safe when playing outside or waiting for the school bus.

Life Changing New Year Resolutions Every Foster Parent Should Make
By Crystal Killion

Foster parenting is both a worthwhile endeavor and a tough job. Make some resolutions that will make it even more rewarding and life changing in the new year.

This is the time of year that many people begin to think about what they want to accomplish in the next year. Lose weight, stop smoking, spend more frugally. As important as these things are, foster parents have an amazing opportunity to influence others and to make a different into the next generation and beyond. This year, make some resolutions for the new year that will change lives. In the coming year resolve to…

Make a Lasting Bond
Make a lasting bond with your foster children. Bonding with these kids can be tough. The longer they have been in the system, the harder it will be to bond with them. It may be impossible. However, everyone benefits when you try. Spend time one-on-one, work together on their lifebook, make it a point to compliment them about something each day, never criticize their birth family, write a short note of encouragement to them or draw a simple picture for a young child. Small things add up to a lot for these children.

Advocate
Advocate for them. As a foster parent, you are with them more than any other person in their life right now. Be their voice with their social workers, therapists, school personnel. Write a letter to the judge who oversees their case and give him or her a progress report

Take Care of Yourself
Take time for you, your marriage, and your birth/adoptive children. Foster parenting is stressful and often thankless. Taking care of yourself and your family will help to prevent burn-out and, in the long run, help the foster children who come into your home, too.

Self-Improvement
Make time for self-improvement. Take a college class, learn how to do something you have always wanted to do but didn't, read a novel, join a gym. Children learn by example and your enthusiasm for learning will be contagious.

Recruit New Foster Families
Recruit another family to become foter parents. According to Family to Family of Orange County California, in an article titled, Background: The Current Challenges of Public Child Welfare, they estimate that over 550,000 children are currently in the foster care system; however, at the same time, they say that only 50% of those children will be placed in foster families due to the low number of foster homes available. When you recruit other loving families for these children, you touch countless lives. Every child deserves a family.

Be a Mentor
Mentor a new foster parent. You were there once. You know that foster parenting can be a lonely road to travel. Make an effort to connect with another foster family to mentor and to listen.

Don't Quit
Be committed as long as it takes. Foster children need somebody who won't give up. Resolve to be that person for them.

December 2010 Foster Parent Spotlight
Chuck & Judy Koenings

Chuck and Judy Koenings met, interestingly, while being the Maid of Honor and Best Man in Judy's sister's wedding. Chuck had been roommates with the groom in Green Bay at the time and was originally from West Bend. He had his social work degree from UW-Milwaukee and was thinking about heading back to the Milwaukee area: conveniently an area where Judy had been living at the time. The rest, they say: "Is history."

The couple now has been married 26 years and has one current foster child and two biological children: Adam and Jenna. Their oldest, Adam, graduated from the University of MN last spring and started law school at Marquette University this fall. Jenna is currently a junior at the University of MN majoring in biology and will graduate next December.

Judy and Chuck were very excited to talk about their foster son's recent 10th birthday party. They had enjoyed seeing that his grandma and great grandpa were both able to join them to celebrate with him and that the experience helped him feel supported and cared for by so many people.

Chuck and Judy had their first placement at the beginning of this year with a sixteen year old that had been a more challenging placement but taught them a lot about what experiences they were ready to handle as foster parents and encouraged them to look toward working with younger foster children, appreciating their flexibility and youthfulness.

A favorite holiday memory with their foster son was the 4th of July where they watched his exuberant, outgoing personality help him have a fun time. They also enjoyed Halloween where he was a Motorcross racer and zoomed around saying "Vrooom…Motorcross!" In the beginning of the school year Chuck and Judy, along with Jenna, their biological daughter, took their foster son to the elementary school where Adam and Jenna had gone and had fun seeing previous teachers again.

While the Koenings point out they are "new in the game" with fostering, they have learned a lot. Judy discussed that one of the most unexpected parts of foster parenting was how often they are involved in teams and with other resources: including going to court, meeting with guardian ad litems (GALs), and arranging visits. They have also appreciated the opportunity of being involved with their foster son's mother when she visited with him.

Through the foster care program the Koenings enjoyed the annual meeting at Elmbrook Church and the Zoo appreciation event where other foster parents had been incredibly welcoming. There have been a few particular families who had been especially helpful through reassuring them, being there to bounce ideas and frustrations off or to help offer feedback. A couple families who had given respite to their foster son had even gave him presents at his birthday. The Koenings family has greatly appreciated all of the support from being part of the foster parent network.

The Koenings are now looking forward to the holidays to spend time with their loved ones and with excitement and a touch of nervousness to see how their foster son will do in meeting both sides of the Koenings' family.

They wish everyone a wonderful holiday season!

Just a reminder - Waukesha County is closed December 24th, 27th, 31st and January 3rd.

Contact Numbers:

Waukesha H & HS
262-548-7212

Children's Mental Health Outreach
262-548-7666

Medical Emergency: 911
Family Emergency: 211

Foster Parent Mentor
Jen Barcus..... 262-542-2926
Judy David..... 414-461-5403
David Mersfelder 262-542-2926
Nikki Mertens..... 262-246-6180

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Mary Alice Grosser, Supervisor Relative Licensing
262-548-7272

Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator
262-548-7267

Libby Sinclair Relative Licensing
262-548-7277

October 2010 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
39 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
16 Children

Group Homes:
7 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
10 Children

Relative Placements:
55 Children

Total Homes Assisting Other Counties
20 Homes

For Allegations of Abuse and Neglect Support, please call:

FASPP
Norma Schoenberg
920-922-9627

Social Workers:

Jennifer Adler 262-548-7265
Bob Alioto 262-548-7262
Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348
Angie Briggs 262-548-7275
Maria Maurer 262-548-7345
Susan Peck 262-548-7348
Janice Ramos 262-896-8069
Michael Reed 262-548-7347
Cindie Remshek 262-548-7639
Greg Rewolinski 262-548-7270
Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349
Kim Sampson 262-548-7273
Mark Sasso 262-548-7346
Linda Senger 262-548-7698
Deanna Stevlingson . 262-896-8570
Rick Wimmer 262-548-7359

We Need You!

For more information about becoming a foster parent in Waukesha County, please contact Shari Rather at:

srather@waukeshacounty.gov

262-548-7267

Or visit our website at www.waukeshacounty.gov And follow the links to foster care.

Jack Safro
Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury
Lexus•Infiniti•Scion