



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
April 2011



Parent-child Visits: Managing the challenges, reaping the rewards From: Fostering Perspectives

After she entered foster care, Donisha learned she would have regular visits with her family. She says that to her:

That word 'visitation' was like a rainbow suddenly appearing out of a dull sky . . . just knowing I could be reunited with my family made me overjoyed.

Donisha's reaction is easy to understand. It can be wonderful to spend time with someone you love after a separation.

Yet visits can also be extremely difficult for everyone involved. If you are a foster and kinship care provider, you know this well. When a visit occurs, it is sometimes accompanied by visit-related upheaval in the child's emotions and behavior, complex scheduling and logistics, and other challenges.

Luckily, there are things you can do to make parent-visits easier for yourself and the children in your care. First, however, it will help to understand why visits are so important.

Understanding the Rewards

Yes, they sometimes make us sweat with uncertainty and cause us temporary discomfort, but research and experience clearly show that parent-child visits can make a positive difference in children's lives.

Regular visits can:

- Maintain parent-child attachment
- Calm children's separation fears
- Empower birth parents
- Encourage birth parents to face reality
- Allow birth parents to learn and practice new skills and behaviors
- Help child welfare agencies and the courts assess and document parents' progress
- Help children and foster parents see the parents realistically (Hess et al., 1992; Cantos & Gries, 1997)

Research also tells us that how frequently parents and children see each other makes a big difference. Children who are visited often by their birth parents are more likely to be reunited and spend less time in foster care (White, et al., 1996; Mech, 1985).

Frequent visits also affect children's well being. Children visited frequently by their parents may be:

- Less likely to have emotional outbursts, tension, and conflict
- Less likely to be referred for psychiatric services
- Less likely to engage in delinquent or antisocial acts such as vandalism, stealing, and running away
- More likely to be seen as likeable by teachers and peers (White et al., 1996; Cantos & Gries, 1997)

One study showed that children visited at least once every two weeks had fewer behavioral problems and exhibited less anxiety and depression than children visited infrequently or not at all (White, et al., 1996).

By helping improve children's behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social functioning, visits can help make foster care placements happier and more stable, which is a good thing for children and foster parents.

Managing Children's Behavior Changes

Foster and kinship care providers need to know how to manage the challenges that surround visits. To provide you with concrete suggestions in this area, in the article below we offer ideas excerpted from "Changes in Children's Behavior Before and After Parent Visits," from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. Although targeted to foster parents of children age five and under, many of these suggestions are relevant to all children in foster care.

Understanding the Child's Response to Birth Parent Visits From: "Changes in Children's Behavior Before and After Parent Visits," from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development

There are no foolproof ways to guarantee that visits between children and their birth parents will be successful. But knowing about behaviors you might see and taking a few steps to prepare a child and facilitate the visit should help.

Before-visit symptoms. Children can be affected by knowing that a visit with their birth parents is approaching. Here are some of the symptoms you might see in your child before the visit:

- Nightmares and sleep disturbances.
- Unrealistic expectations about how the visit will go.
- Anxiety.

After-visit symptoms. Children can experience a variety of feelings after visiting with their birth parents. They also might behave in ways that are difficult to cope with. Feelings and behaviors you might see from your child after a visit include:

- Nightmares and sleep disturbances.
- Crying, sometimes excessively.
- Sadness.
- Disappointment.

- Acting out, such as stomping feet, displaying antisocial behavior, and ignoring family members.
- Anger.
- Ambivalence.
- Withdrawal.
- Anxiety.

Preparing for the visit. It is important to do what you can to prepare the children for a visit with birth parents. Here are some suggestions:

- Make the necessary changes in your family's schedule to accommodate the visit.
- Work with the birth parents to plan and schedule visits.
- Keep the child informed of planned visits.
- Have some special before-visit rituals to comfort the child, such as arranging special clothes or fixing the child's hair in a particular way.
- Be realistic with the child about which family members will and will not be at the visits—for example, mom only, mom and dad, grandparents, etc.



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

Training



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

Hi All, with the overall state of the economy and ongoing budget challenges, we try to "stay ahead of the curve" and minimize the impact on the children and families we serve. You're probably wondering how that's done! Well, amongst many things:

- My supervisors and I participate in State and Regional Committees when changes are discussed and we provide feedback on any draft memorandums that are created.
- When changes are proposed, we meet with our fiscal staff and review the budget and discuss budget impact.
- We share and review any state memorandum or proposed legislative bill with our Executive Team (made up of primarily of the Director, Deputy Director and the Division Managers)
- We obtain and seek feedback from various advisory committee's including CAFSAC (Child and Adolescent Services Advisory Committee) and our Special Services Advisory Sub-Committee (this includes our Birth to Three Program).
- I meet regularly with my supervisors and we discuss any changes in programs or funding that affect our child welfare division.
- My supervisors meet regularly with their staff and are available for guidance and support whenever a child is on the verge of a out of home care placement.
- We consider other options "of doing business" and see if we can provide services in a cost effective manner. Some examples include our involvement with the Strengthening Families Initiatives and Parent Cafe's; Trauma Informed Partnership of Waukesha County and Foster Parent Training and Support.
- I'm a strong believer in President Kennedy's saying, "It's not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country". With that, we support our supervisors and social work staff in developing their skills in family engagement, bonding & attachment, mediation and making sure they work effectively in collaboration with our community partners.

In summary, we will continue to work with our staff, community partners, educators, legal representatives and most, importantly our families and foster families to provide services that ensure the safety, well-being and offer every child a sense of permanency or a place they can all home. We don't know what the future holds in store, but we'll work to minimize the impact on the children and families we serve.

Jesse

Waukesha County Foster Parent Annual Meeting and Potluck

May 12, 2011
5:15 PM to ?
Elmbrook Church
777 South Barker Road in Brookfield

Come and learn about the new
CANS Assessment Tool
Updates in the World of Foster Care
Appreciation Event
Staff Changes - Meet the two new social workers
Socialize with other foster parents
Dinner will begin at 5:15 PM
Meeting will begin at 6:15 PM
3 hours of ongoing training credit will be given to those who attend.

Prices for some classes may apply. Call 262-549-5575 to register. Free pre-registered childcare is available while attending most classes. Space is limited.

Calming the Explosive Volcano
Mondays, April 4 - 25
6:00 - 7:30 PM

Anger in Relationships
Tuesdays, April 5 - 26
6:00 - 7:30 PM

Co-Creative Discipline: Teaching Children to Cooperate
Thursdays, April 7 & 21
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Waukesha County Launches Prescription Discount Card That Can Be Used By All Residents

Waukesha County launched today a discount card program to help consumers cope with the price of prescriptions. The County is making free prescription drug discount cards available under a program sponsored by the National Association of Counties (NACo) that offers average savings of 24 percent off the retail price of commonly prescribed drugs.

The cards may be used by all County residents, regardless of age, income, or existing health coverage and are accepted at approximately 80 County pharmacies. A national network of more than 60,000 participating retail pharmacies also will honor the NACo prescription discount card.

"Waukesha County is proud to be one of the counties nationwide participating with NACo," said County Executive Dan Vrakas. "The NACo prescription discount card offers significant savings for the uninsured and underinsured residents of our County and even those fortunate to have prescription coverage can use the card to save money on medications that are not covered by their health plan. Best of all, there is no cost to county taxpayers for NACo and Waukesha County to make these money savings cards available to our residents."

Residents can visit www.caremark.com/naco to print an identification card and use it immediately at any participating pharmacy. Cards will also be available at various County offices including the Register of Deeds, the Health and Human Services Building, the Aging and Disability Resource Center, the Treasurer's, County Executive's, Clerk of Court's, and County Clerk's Offices and libraries throughout the County. County residents can call toll free 1-877-321-2652 or visit www.caremark.com/naco for assistance with the program.

"Using the NACo prescription discount card is easy," Vrakas said. "Simply present it at a participating pharmacy. There is no enrollment form, no membership fee and no restrictions or limits on frequency of use. Cardholders and their family members may use the card at any time their prescriptions are not covered by insurance."

The program is administered by CVS Caremark.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county government in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation's 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public's understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.

Understanding the Child's Response to Birth Parent Visits Continued from Page 1

- Be open about which non-family members will be at the visit. These might include a social worker, other caseworkers, yourself, etc.
- Provide extra emotional support to your child before the visit.
- Make a game out of before-visit time. You might, for example, let the children "play the social worker" by having them ask questions and play the role.
- Find out what the child would like to do at the visit and try to arrange the activity. If his or her idea is not realistic work with him or her to come up with a more practical plan.
- Talk about any items—toys, books, etc.—they would like to take to the visit.

Facilitating visits. You always should try your best to make visits between children and their birth parents go smoothly. Here are a few steps you can take that might help:

- Try to have the visit take place in your home or in the birth parents' home rather than in an agency office.
- Volunteer to provide transportation to and from visits.
- Help birth parents by being a model of appropriate parenting behavior.
- Reinforce the birth parents' confidence in their parenting skills when they show positive change.
- Respect the birth parents and treat them fairly.
- When appropriate or necessary, observe visits.
- Be careful when talking about the birth parents. Try to be positive.



After-visit support. There may be some circumstances that occur that need attention after the visit. Here are some suggestions for handling the period after the visit.

- Talk to the child and about how the visit went.
- Let the child talk about how he or she feels about the visit and parents.
- Encourage questions about the visit or the foster situation. Answer them as honestly as possible.
- Reassure the children about any issues they might be concerned about.
- Ask your child what kinds of activities he or she would like to do at the next visit.
- Explain that you understand it can be difficult to visit parents for a little while and then have to leave them again.
- If possible, let the child know when the next visit is scheduled.
- Spend additional time nurturing the child and showing extra affection. Do this regardless of how the visit went, but especially when a visit does not go well.
- If the child is consistently unhappy or distressed after visits, report this to the social worker.
- Report any suspicion of child abuse immediately.

When a visit is canceled. A canceled can be hard on a child. Here are ways to support the child when that happens:

- Provide additional comforting when visits are canceled, for whatever reason.
- When telling the child about a canceled visit, do not blame. Simply explain that the parent made certain choices, the social worker had to reschedule, etc.
- Assure the child that he or she is not the reason the visit was canceled, he or she did not do anything wrong, and he or she is still loved.
- Try to do the activity with the child that was planned with the parents, if possible.
- Spend extra time with the child.

When to seek professional help. Changes in a child's behavior after a visit do not necessarily mean the visit hurt the child. The change might, for example, mean the child has a secure attachment with the parent and that he or she is upset about having to leave the parent again. However, if the behavior changes are severe or overly disruptive to the foster family, professional help may be necessary, and the situation should be brought to the attention of the child's social worker.

A publication of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development made possible with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education. Additional topics in the You and Your Foster Child series are available at www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/publications/fosterparent. Other helpful publications on parenting, youth and families from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development are also available online at www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family.

Helping Children by Engaging Their Parents By Donna Foster

Kim was 12 years old and had been in foster care for some time when she came to live with us. As we got to know one another, I asked Kim why she left her other foster homes, where she had been placed with her sisters. She was very clear: "I wanted to see my Mom and my sisters hated my Mom. I wanted to go home with her and I felt no one there (at the foster home) would help me."

After hearing her viewpoint of her past life and future plans, I understood why Kim voiced her demands from the start. She wanted to see her Mom, talk to her Mom, and one day, go home to her Mom.

What she didn't know about me was that, as a foster parent, I believe the stronger the healthy connections are between a child and her birth family, the more resources I have available to help the child.

I never discourage children from talking about their birth families. Understanding their families aids me in understanding the children. If I want to do my part in helping children understand their situations and plan for their futures, there isn't any room for judgment. Who they are is where they have come from. The people who take part in the growing years of a child make an imprint on the child's life; they all become a piece of who and what the child becomes.

Engaging Kim's Mom

Kim's mother was very angry at me and at DSS. She resisted the Judge's orders: parenting classes, therapy, stable employment, and adequate housing. She had a job and was ready for a larger apartment if the children could come home. But she felt she didn't need to do the other things.

When I first met her she was forceful and angry. But when I acted in ways to build her trust in me, such as sitting behind her in court to support her and giving her updates on Kim's daily developments, she mellowed. In time, she did all she was ordered to do. Kim's mother had a personal disaster which lengthened Kim's return, but throughout the years, she showed her love to Kim. Kim and I wrote a letter to the Judge stating our strong support for reunification and listed the factual proof of Kim's mother's involvement with her.

In the five years Kim lived with us her mother and my husband and I shared in parenting Kim. Her mother attended all Kim's school events, meetings, and church activities. She and I developed the house rules and consequences and we enforced them together. She chose to use the same discipline plan with Kim on her visits home.

Kim needed this time to reconnect with her family. There were hard times (raising a teen is difficult for any parent) but the good times were wonderful. Kim regained her relationships with her siblings as the years passed. I felt instrumental in aiding Kim on her adolescent journey and we will be there for her throughout her life.

An unexpected benefit to being a foster parent for Kim and working with her birth family was that our two families became one. Kim never felt she had to choose one family over another.

Not all children have happy endings. There are birth families who don't want to cooperate or are dangerous to their children and others. There are absent parents. There are children who don't want to reunite.

Even so, there are ways to help children gather information about their families and understand their situation. Time spent helping children fill in their life's gaps through talking and creating a life book builds a stronger relationship between foster parents, social workers and the child. In the end, the child wins.

Donna Foster, an author, national trainer, and consultant, lives in Charlotte, NC. This article has been adapted from "The Voice of a Child," in *Fostering Perspectives* v. 4, n. 2. Copyright © 2008 Jordan Institute for Families

Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

Starting in March 2011 Prospective Foster Parents need to do
Part 1 of the training on the following website:

<http://www.wcwt.wisc.edu/foster-parent-training>

We will then meet to discuss the learning points and to answer your questions.

Thursday, April 21, 2011

5:45-8:45 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.

April 2011 Foster Parent Spotlight

Debra & Kevin Sonnemann



Debra and Kevin Sonnemann met at a restaurant where she worked. Debra has a background in elementary education and co-owns a day-care in Pewaukee, WI. Kevin works with planning radiation treatment for cancer

The children were 10 months and 3 ½ years old when they first came to Debra and Kevin's home. They are currently five and eight years old and have been adopted.

Debra states that with five children and two dogs in her home, it is a very busy place. To her, the biggest reward is how eye opening the experience is. The adjustments of their changing family were hard but she learned patience through it all. The hardest part of the process was adjusting to having two little children in their home again.

patients. Currently, the couple have three biological children. Their daughter Amanda is 21 years old and their sons are Corey 19 and Aaron 15. Their two oldest children attend college and the 15 year old is in high school. Their family also has two dogs.

Debra's advice to other foster parents is to have an open mind, be prepared for anything and be flexible.

One day, Debra received an email from a mother of one of the children in her daycare. The email was inquiring whether anyone was interested in taking in two children. These two children were the great niece and nephew of this mother's neighbor. Debra and Kevin decided to take the children into their home.



After having the children in their home for a period of time, there were concerns that the children would be removed from their home due to circumstances of the case. Since Debra and Kevin did not want the children to keep moving around, they decided to be licensed as a foster home in order to keep the children in their care.

<p>Contact Numbers:</p> <p>Waukesha H & HS 262-548-7212</p> <p>Children's Mental Health Outreach 262-548-7666</p> <p>Medical Emergency: 911 Family Emergency: 211</p> <p>Foster Parent Mentor Jen Barcus..... 262-542-2926 Judy David..... 414-461-5403 David Mersfelder 262-542-2926 Nikki Mertens..... 262-246-6180</p> <p>Lisa Roberts, Supervisor 262-548-7271</p> <p>Mary Alice Grosser, Supervisor Relative Licensing 262-548-7272</p> <p>Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator 262-548-7267</p> <p>Libby Sinclair Relative Licensing 262-548-7277</p>	<p>February 2011 Placements</p> <p>Regular Foster Care: 32 Children</p> <p>Treatment Foster Care: 16 Children</p> <p>Group Homes: 3 Children</p> <p>Residential Care Facilities: 17 Children</p> <p>Relative Placements: 60 Children</p> <p>Regular Foster Homes: 114 Homes</p> <p>Total Homes Assisting Other Counties 15 Homes</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>For Allegations of Abuse and Neglect Support, please call:</p> <p>FASPP Norma Schoenberg 920-922-9627</p> </div>	<p>Social Workers:</p> <p>Jennifer Adler 262-548-7265</p> <p>Bob Alioto 262-548-7262</p> <p>Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348</p> <p>Angie Briggs 262-548-7275</p> <p>Kate Flansburg 262-896-6857</p> <p>Maria Maurer 262-548-7345</p> <p>Susan Peck 262-548-7348</p> <p>Janis Ramos 262-896-8069</p> <p>Michael Reed 262-548-7347</p> <p>Cindie Remshek 262-548-7639</p> <p>Greg Rewolinski 262-548-7270</p> <p>Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349</p> <p>Kim Sampson 262-548-7273</p> <p>Mark Sasso 262-548-7346</p> <p>Linda Senger 262-548-7698</p> <p>Deanna Stevlingson . 262-896-8570</p> <p>Rick Wimmer 262-548-7359</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">We Need You!</p> <p>For more information about becoming a foster parent in Waukesha County, please contact Shari Rather at:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">srather@waukeshacounty.gov</p> <p style="text-align: center;">262-548-7267</p> <p>Or visit our website at www.waukeshacounty.gov And follow the links to foster care.</p> <div style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Jack Safro Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury Lexus•Infiniti•Scion</p> </div>
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