



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
July 2011



Teaching Children to Take Care of Themselves By: Nancy Carter, ILR Associate Director, SaySo Executive Director

As a parent or caregiver of a child or young person, our primary goal is to raise children to be loving, confident, well-rounded, self-sufficient young adults. This is true for any child - adopted, foster, biological, or even those who visit our homes for short periods.

When children who have been abused or neglected enter our homes, it is natural to want to love and protect them. Unfortunately, often we do this by insulating them from opportunities to learn skills that help them take care of themselves. Our best way of loving the young people brought into our care is to teach them by learning to take care of themselves, they will learn to also love themselves, enjoy their capacity to productively participate in the world, and begin to trust decisions they make as they grow older.

The future is uncertain for young people with foster care experience. So while they are with us, we need to engage them in daily teaching moments. Even the small decisions adults take for granted are important life skill opportunities. When we do this we will feel satisfied knowing the young people in our homes have increased the number of "tools in their survival kit" to take care of themselves in the real world.

When to Start?

Our responsibility to help young people become self-sufficient begins the moment they are born. Unfortunately, most independent living programs start at age 13 or 16, so there is a misconception that this is when to start teaching young people tools to live in the real world. Federal and state funds are earmarked for youths of this age due to the urgency of their impending transition.

Experienced parents, however, will agree that waiting until a child is a teenager to teach live skills means missing out on many "golden moments" when youths are developmentally ready to "do it myself." When children are developmentally ready, the parent can coach by modeling the skill, assisting the child with the skill, and then finally allowing the child to "do it him/herself," practicing while the adult provides helpful feedback.

This **Model, Assist, Practice** method (Figure 1) may happen in one moment or over days/weeks/months, depending on the age and abilities of the child. Parents are cautioned not to assume that because a child is 10 years old, he or she should be capable of performing skills at the same level as most other 10 year old. Each young person will be at

different developmental stages based on the traumas and setbacks they have experienced. This is in no way a reflection of the young person's ability to learn, so remember to be patient as you become acquainted with the inherent skills and strengths of the children in your home.

Life Skills: A Developmental Approach

Developmentally, children of all ages can learn life skills. The challenge for the parent is to determine what the young person can manage and still be motivated to learn.

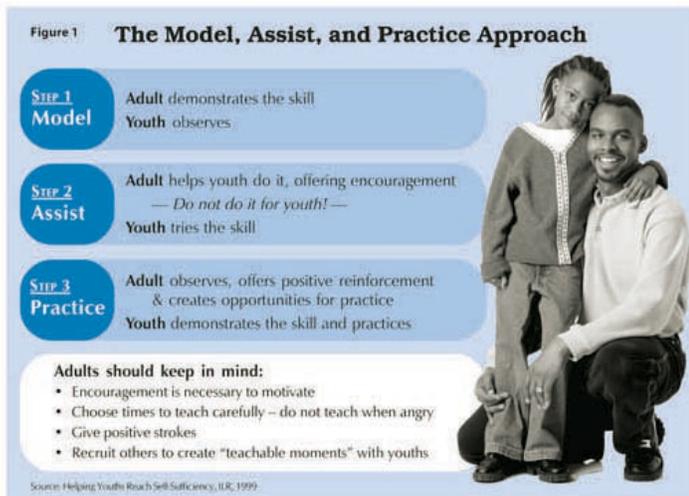
For instance, when faced with growing piles of laundry, parents should see this as an opportunity to engage their children in the process. Yes, it may be easier and faster to "do it yourself," but in the long run, teaching skills like sorting, not overloading the washing machine, temperature of water, etc., will go a long way towards helping young people build increased capacity to do their laundry independently.

Consider "playtime" as an opportunity for a toddler to sort the colored clothes from the whites, the towels and bed sheets from the clothes, etc. Once the appropriate piles are made, toddler can bring the items to your pre-teen to place them in the washing machine, who will then receive some instruction from you regarding amount of detergent, temperature of water, and so on. In some cases, an older youth in the home who has mastered doing their laundry can assist the younger ones.

In the profession of life skills education, it is common knowledge that when youths teach skills they retain that skill at a higher level (*Project Stepping Out*, Baltimore County DSS, 1985.) Therefore, whenever possible, invite youths with demonstrated skills to teach those skills to other children in the home.

Pay particular attention to how the children respond to your direction. If they grasp the instructions quickly, proceed with the next step. If the young person seems confused, repeat and demonstrate the skill, breaking it into even smaller, concrete steps. Do not forget to **Model, Assist**, and allow youths to **Practice**. Parents often need to relinquish some control in order for youths to feel like they can control things in their life, even if it is just the laundry, cooking, hygiene, and so on.

Continued on Page 3



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.wcwts.wisc.edu/foster-parent-training>

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

Monday, July 18, 2011 6-9 PM
Important: Please Note Date Change for July Meeting

Thursday, August 18, 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

In this past month, I attended the 2011 Wisconsin Summit on Children and Families. The 2011 Wisconsin Summit on Children and Families is a multi-disciplinary conference where state, tribal, and county child welfare and court system professionals focused on strategies to improve outcomes for Wisconsin children and families. The conference content emphasized effective engagement of children and families to achieve timely permanence.

As some of you may know, we sent a team to the conference five years ago. Because of that conference, we created the Children First Collaboration Committee. Our mission: Is to access and implement change for the improvement of permanency planning for children and their families.

Many of the same individuals that attended the first conference in 2006 also attended this conference. We were honored to have our Waukesha County Juvenile Court Judge, the Honorable Michael Bohren and Juvenile Court Commissioner, Linda Georgeson attend along with members of our current committee. During the conference, our local team had an opportunity to discuss and update our local action plan. We also agreed to meet and discuss several issues including increasing the use of Family Team Meetings, identifying and ensuring family connections, and concurrent planning. We will keep you updated on the status of our committee in upcoming Jesse's Corner articles.

During the conference, we had the opportunity to hear from former foster youth about their experience in the foster care system. The last presenter at the conference was an adult who shared his experience as a child raised in the foster care system in California. The presenter, Andrew Bridge, wrote a book called Hopes Boy, and he talked about his foster care experience from the age of 7 through high school and college graduation. More importantly, he talked about his bond and attachment to his mother and his maternal grandmother and concern about the minimal contact he had with them throughout his foster care placement. He missed and yearned to see his mother and grandmother. He shared his views on the importance of "family" and the challenges of being a part of a foster family. He stated his experience was more like a tenant, someone just renting space and not truly feeling a sense of belonging. He was concerned about being moved from his foster home (the foster home was a receiving home and took children for short periods). As a result, he was always fearful of doing something wrong that might lead to his removal, so he behaved and did not share his true feelings or how his foster parents were treating him. He talked about the people who encouraged him and recognized his strengths and talent and this enabled him to find success in school. He completed high school, went to college and eventually graduated from Harvard Law School!

After listening to him speak, I wanted to share his view that many children have a bond and attachment to their parents that may never be broken despite the issues that brought them to the attention of child protection. I also think we need to keep in mind the impact of what we say, how we interact and respond to children that are in our foster care system. We may never know what comment, words of encouragement, or gesture will influence a child to succeed so we need to be mindful of that every time we interact with children in foster care.

Jesse

Greetings Foster Parents:

It is that time of year that I have Milwaukee Brewer Tickets available. I have tickets for the following games:

- August 1, 2011 against the St. Louis Cardinals at 7:10 PM
- August 16, 2011 against the Los Angeles Dodgers at 7:10 PM



Please email me if you are interested in a game and the number of tickets you need and I will forward you the tickets. Just remember you need to use the tickets because the Brewers do keep track of the empty seats.

Hope to see you at the game,

Shari

Training Offered By Waukesha County

Parent Café

July 21, 2011

5:30 PM

Center for Excellence

N4W22000 Bluemound Road

Waukesha

To register for childcare, RSVP or for questions call, 262-548-8080.



Training

Parents Place Programs

262-549-5575

www.ppacinc.org

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.

New Ideas in Parenting—Relationship Skills for Parents

Tuesdays, July 5 & 12

5:30 - 7:30 PM

The Argumentative Child

Mondays, July 11 - 25

5:30 - 7:30 PM

New Ideas for Parenting Children & Adolescence with ADHD/ADD

Tuesdays, July 19 & 26

5:30 - 7:30 PM

Secrets to Good Communication

Wednesdays, July 20 & 27

5:30 - 7:30 PM

Anger in Relationships

Mondays, August 1 - 15

5:30 - 7:30 PM

Love and Logic®

Tuesdays, August 2 - 30

6:00 - 7:30 PM

Kids Smarts: A Preschool Readiness Program

Tuesdays, August 2 & 16

9:30 - 10:30 AM

Waukesha County Human Services and Jack Safo Toyota Present Foster Parent Appreciation Event



"An Afternoon with the Animals"

July 13, 2011

2:00 to 8:00

Milwaukee County Zoo

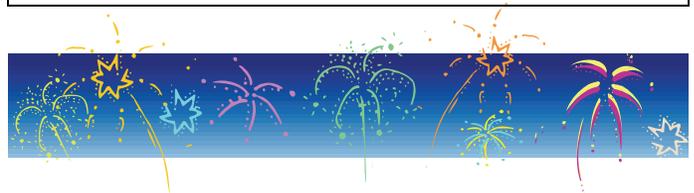
The Old Style Terrace

See you there!

RESERVE YOUR SPOT BY CALLING

SHARI RATHER @ 262-548-7267

Any foster parents or children who have special talents are invited to participate in the talent show! Start practicing and show off your skills! Free picnic dinner, music throughout the day, arts & crafts, and face painting are just some of the fun things planned!



Teaching Children to Take Care of Themselves Continued from Page 1

This developmental approach to life skills is based on the idea that anyone at any age can learn something about the skill. The job of the parent or adult in charge is finding that place on the “concrete” to “abstract” continuum (Figure 2) where a young person has the ability to start learning.



Although every skill can be placed on this continuum, do not assume a young person with an abstract level of understanding in the area of cooking will have a similar understanding in the area of experience. Often the young person's level of understanding corresponds with the amount of exposure they have had related to the area.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of how the laundry skills continuum can be broken down into smaller, developmental steps. At one end of the continuum, a child is very concrete and smaller steps are needed for the child to understand what to do. This child may even need pictures on a poster to illustrate the appropriate steps to clean their bedroom. Statements such as “go clean your room” are too abstract and a child's reaction to not understanding the task may range from complete avoidance to anger.

At the other end of the continuum, abstract thinking is achieved. An example is a young person who knows (or has learned from experience) that if they wash their red clothes with white clothes, they will end up with a basket of pink clothes. They also can learn more advanced techniques such as determining dry cleaning needs, removing tough stains, understanding label instruction, etc. Most adults function at the abstract level, so it is natural for them to give verbal instructions to children at an abstract level.

Again, the challenge for the adult is to reduce their instruction/demonstration to more concrete tasks to enable the young person, who may be at any point of the continuum, to achieve some success in learning the skill. Parents and caregivers must always remember that even if the young person does not learn the entire continuum of a skill, consistent exposure and practice with the specific tasks will provide increased confidence.

Of course, parental feedback is also important; it accompanies the **Practice** step of our teaching model. Be as specific and positive as possible, but not phony. Global statements like “good job” can make anything or nothing. If you can be specific it adds credibility to your feedback. The following comments are specific to small tasks: “You added just the right amount of detergent for this load” and “Great job, you remembered the dryer sheet before I reminded you.”

Skills to Focus on

Although laundry skills were used in the example, life skills include both tangible and intangible skills. **Tangible skills** include activities that are easily seen, touched, and measured such as cooking, laundry, and money management.

Intangible skills include those that are more internalized and build over time, such as decision-making, time management, and socialization. Both types of skills are necessary to make a successful transition to the adult world. That's why it is so important to start exposing youths to a range of skills at an early age and allow them to practice, practice, and practice even more.

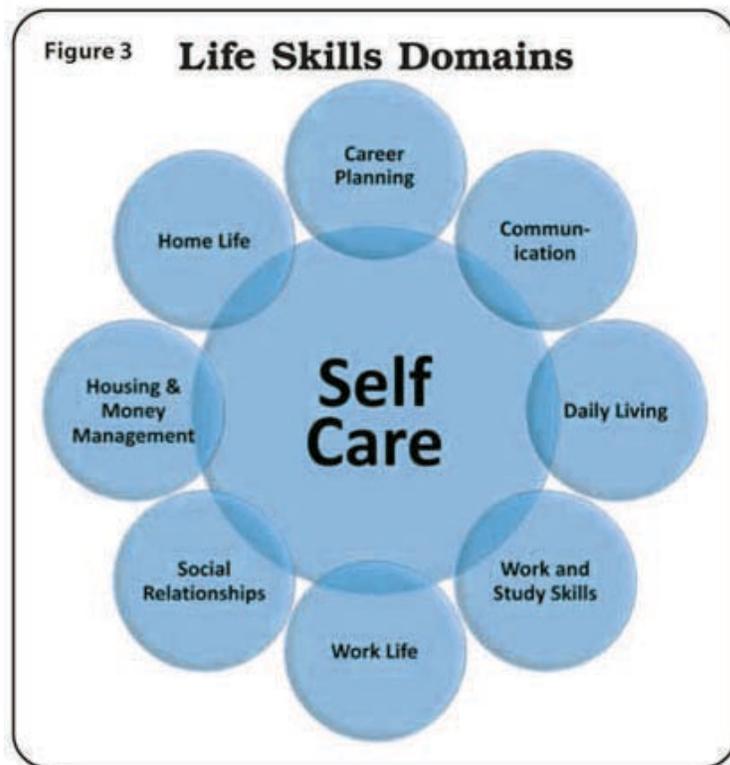
According to the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), nine domains are considered important to achieve self-sufficiency. The ACLSA is an assessment to determine goals for young people to reach self-sufficiency. The ACLSA suggests beginning these assessments at age 8.

The domains and some examples of each include the following:

- **Career Planning:** what are youths' interests and how do those connect to a career plan?

- **Communication:** emotional health, understands strengths and needs, respectful
- **Daily Living:** nutrition, meal preparation, leisure time, legal issues
- **Home Life:** clothing care, home safety
- **Housing and Money Management:** saving, credit, budgeting, housing, transportation
- **Self Care:** hygiene, health, sexuality, drugs and other substances
- **Social Relationships:** cultural, inter-personal, support systems, conflict management
- **Work Life:** employment search, applications, resume, maintain employment, etiquette
- **Work and Study Skills:** decision-making, study techniques, how to use the Internet

As Figure 3 shows, some domain goals overlap with other domains - self-care/self-sufficiency skills are interrelated. It should also be noted that a young person will normally achieve varying levels of competency for each of the domains. Therefore, each domain should be evaluated independently. Assessments can be completed free online at www.caseylifeskills.org



Programs in every state are beginning to evaluate how well young people are being prepared to be self-sufficient. Through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), young people in foster care are now being evaluated at age 17 and again at ages 19 and 21.

The home and community are the best settings for exposing youths to life skills and giving them a chance to learn and practice them. Parents, guardians, and caregivers (including respite foster parents) are in a perfect position to help expand the “tools in a young person's survival kit.”

Try not to worry about mistakes they will make. Everyone has a “pink clothes” story. Mistakes are often the best way to learn what works most effectively.

Allowing young people to teach you some skills, such as how to program the remote control or your new cell phone, may help create a cooperative environment of teaching and sharing in your home. One of the best ways to see that you are helping youths reach self-sufficiency is to allow youths to practice those skills and watch them improve. Also, encourage other parents to support life skills learning and practice homes as well.

As a community we can build a generation of young people who are better prepared to take care of themselves and care for our world.

July 2011 Foster Parent Spotlight

Angie & Peter Van Heesch



Angie and Peter Van Heesch have known each other since they were in high school. Although they broke up in college, the two met up again at a friend's wedding. After trying to have a baby for about seven years, the couple looked into adoption, specifically special needs adoption.

While looking into this, they heard about the process of fostering to adoption in a meeting at the Goodwill Center. They were interested in this and soon after started the process of becoming licensed foster parents.

At first, Angie was sure she wanted a baby in their home (0-4 years old), after some convincing from Peter, they also indicated they were interested in children who are a little bit older as well. Soon after becoming licensed as foster parents, a set of twins (one girl, one boy) were placed in their home. These children were five years old when they were placed. Four months after the twins were placed in their home, their older sister who is about ten years old was also placed in their home.

According to Angie, the rewards of being foster parents are seeing the children grow and learn. She loves seeing each of the children become their own people. At first, Angie thought that since she wasn't fostering babies that she was going to miss out on all of the "firsts" that occur with babies. For example, the first time they crawl or speak. Throughout the fostering process, she realized that although she and her husband were not there for those firsts, they can make their own firsts with their foster children. For example, Angie and Peter have taken the children on their first horseback rides and fishing trips. These "firsts" memories are as precious to them as any other firsts.

Some of the challenges of the fostering process for Angie and Peter have been dealing with the court process. At times, it can be confusing and frustrating. Another challenge of the fostering process has also

been dealing with the aftermath of visitations with the birthmother. Aside from these challenges, the couple loves the fostering process. Angie is glad she chose to become involved with the school. She has volunteered at the children's school with math and at the library. At first, she was hesitant to do this, but is glad she decided to. Sometimes her foster children have behavioral issues at school and the teachers are much more willing to go the extra step since they know her through her work at the school. Her husband has also been a soccer coach for one of the twin's teams. The family calls it their "boy time."

If Angie could give advice to other foster parents, it would be to be willing to say yes to new experiences and not be set in stone. At first, Angie wanted to foster a baby but ended up with older children. She says she loves the experience and if she were to foster again she would want children around the same age as she has now. She compares having to change diapers all the time to, instead, being able to see these children verbalize their feelings and experiences.



Happy 4th of July

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
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

May 2011 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
38 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
17 Children

Group Homes:
4 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
9 Children

Relative Placements:
79 Children

Level 2 Foster Homes:
107 Homes

Level 1 Foster Homes:
84 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties
14 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

Kate Flansburg 262-896-6857

Maria Maurer 262-548-7345

Susan Peck..... 262-548-7348

Janis 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