

# Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County  
Health & Human Services  
November 2011



## Parent-Child Visits and Shared Parenting From: Views on Foster Care and Adoption in North Carolina

Shared parenting is a practice in which foster parents cultivate positive, supportive relationships with birth parents. Shared parenting relationships are based on trust, while keeping the safety and best interests of the child in focus.

Parent-child visiting and shared parenting are a natural fit. As Kate, a mother whose child spent time in foster care, explains in the box below, contact between foster and birth parents - including contact during visitation - can sometimes blossom into relationships that help parents make the changes needed to reunify their families.

### Shared Parenting: A Gradual Process

Shared parenting doesn't happen all at once. Like most relationships, it usually develops gradually. After the initial meeting during the first week the child enters foster care, shared parenting often starts with low-level contact between the birth and foster parent - for example, through the exchange of a weekly journal documenting the child's week and asking questions that only the birth parent can answer.

As everyone grows more comfortable, the relationship between birth and foster parents might progress, involving steps such as:

- Recording the family reading a book and playing it for the child at bedtime
- Going shopping with the birth parent for shoes for the child
- Having dinner at the foster parent's home.

### Visit-Related Shared Parenting

Here are suggestions for engaging in shared parenting in and around parent-child visits:

- Discuss the family's expectations about contacts and visits within the foster home, birth home, and community. Are visits doable with everyone's schedule? Can the child call the family whenever he wants or just at certain times of the day?
- Welcome the child's family into your home, and set boundaries with both the parents and child about any areas that are off limits (usually bedrooms). Or go with the child and family if the child wants to give a tour of the whole house.
- Encourage regular contact between parents and children, as approved by the placing agency. Help make parents feel comfortable visiting in the foster home, or work with the family to find a neutral spot where everyone feels comfortable (school, a mall, library, restaurant, etc.).
- Reassure the parents your job as a foster parent is to keep the child safe and provide temporary care. Remind them you are not a replacement for the child's parents.
- Send the child to visits with art work, school work, or even homework they can work on with their parents.
- Send the child to visits dressed in clothing that the birth parents have provided for them.
- Write down important information such as milestones, illnesses, new food choices, and updates in a journal and send it with the child to visits.
- Try to arrange the child's schedule so that the birth parent can feed the baby a bottle or give their child a snack during the visit. (Sources for these suggestions: Foster, 2009; Buncombe Co. DSS, 2009)

### What Shared Parenting Accomplishes

- Child's relationship with the birth parent is maintained
- Foster parents form a realistic picture of birth parent's strengths and needs
- Both birth and foster parents have more information about the child

- Foster parents model appropriate behavior and parenting techniques
- Smoother transitions back into the birth parent's home
- Ongoing support for the family after the child returns home

### Working Together to Help Darren Return Home

Excerpted from *A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System* by McCarthy et al. (2005)

I visited Darren a lot while he was in foster care and worked hard to get him back. Even though I had two relapses, I went to school full-time and worked part-time. I lived in a shelter some of the time, and I got TANF. Although I wasn't told where Darren's foster home was, I knew because some of the forms that I got from the doctor after Darren's appointments had the foster home address on them. I did not go to the foster home, but it was comforting for me to know where he lived...

After our visits, I always took Darren back to the agency where his foster mother would pick him up. For about a year, I never saw her. One day the agency worker had to leave before the foster mother arrived, so she asked if I would stay with Darren until his foster mother came. When we met, we were both very stiff, sizing each other up, and didn't think we would like each other. But we were cordial. Shortly after this, Darren's foster mother, Sally, called to tell me that Darren was going to be in a pageant at her church, and she invited me to come. Sally began to invite me to go on other outings with her and Darren. Gradually, we got used to each other, liked each other, and started working together to help Darren return home.

Getting to know Sally is what "did it" ... Sally helped Darren and me gradually become a family again.

### Kate, Darren's Mom, and Sally, His Foster Mom, Reflect on their Success

**Kate:** Darren is the one who has benefited the most from the way that Sally and I work together. Sally never tried to replace me in Darren's life. She told him that he couldn't be with me because I was sick and was trying to get better. She let me become very involved in Darren's life while he lived in her home, and she came to every court hearing with me. She didn't let him call her mom, it was Mom Sally or just Sally. Now that he is living with me, he calls her Aunt Sally.

Darren has been home for 5 years. He is now 10 years old, and Sally is still a part of our lives. Darren has ADHD and goes for a lot of treatment and doctor's appointments...

**Sally:** Kate allows me to co-parent Darren, even after he returned to her home. We have the benefits of co-parenting without having to go through a marriage and a divorce. Darren goes with me on my summer vacation...

**Kate:** When Darren lived with Sally, we tried to have the same rules for him so he wouldn't be confused. When he came to visit me, I tried to keep the same routine and rules that Sally had established. The three of us went to counseling together. This helped ease the transition for Darren. Now that Darren is older, we are more flexible...

**Sally:** This story is about Darren, not about us. As Kate said, Darren is the one who has benefited the most from our working together. He has not had to leave behind any of the people that he has grown up with. He has a larger extended family than he would have had. He was a troubled little boy when he came into foster care at two and a half years old. He had hearing and speech problems, night terrors, and couldn't be contained for a very long period of time. But he was always loving and smiling...

**Kate:** I always knew that Sally had Darren's best interests in her heart and that she was working with me and not against me. I knew what I had to do to get Darren back home. Sally didn't make me do any of these things, but she supported all my efforts.



## Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles  
Manager of the Children and  
Family Division

As I noted in previous "Jesse's Corner" segments, our division has been working collaboratively with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System and the American Public Human Services Association regarding Organizational Effectiveness (OE). As part of the OE effort, our division formed a Continuous Improvement Team whose membership includes staff, supervisors and myself. The team in the Children and Family Division is committed to "quick wins", mid-term and long-term process changes as part of our OE work. This has allowed us to work together in a collaborative process that focuses on organizational improvements aimed toward improving the division functions and processes in order to best serve children and families and build staff unity and morale. We will keep you posted on the status of these items during the upcoming months. Stay tuned!

I was asked to share my views about the upcoming Shared Parenting Training and why foster parents should attend. In my 30 plus years of working in child welfare, I've notice the value and importance of our foster parents working directly and collaboratively with our birth parents. Over the years, many of our foster children have successfully reunited with their parents due to the shared parenting efforts made by foster parents. Foster parents who recognize the value and importance of extending themselves and developing a relationship with the parent have seen them grow as individuals and parents. I have to admit this is quite a challenge for foster parents but many have done this successfully. However, it will take a lot of training, work and dedication for a foster parent to mentor, coach, listen and "be there" when the parent needs support. In many cases a child will return home, in others, the parents will decide that guardianship or an adoption would be better. Whatever the parent decides, it's mostly influenced by their relationship with the foster parents. Much to my surprise and more often than not, in many of these shared parenting cases, it's the relationship and support that parents get from the foster parents that enable them to make a decision about their child's future sooner rather than later. As you know, the sooner we can get to "permanency" the better. So, I encourage all of you to make this a priority and attend the Shared Parenting Training below:

There is a webinar on November 10, 2011 from 7 pm to 8:30 pm called Successful Shared Parenting from Start to Finish (this webinar is for experienced foster parents and staff).

The Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership is sponsoring a Shared Parenting Training on November 19, 2011 at Elmbrook Church 777 S Barker Rd in Brookfield from 9 am until 4 pm.

You can register for both trainings at [www.southernpartnership.wisc.edu](http://www.southernpartnership.wisc.edu) under the foster parent tab

In addition to the Shared Parenting Training offered above, we are very pleased to provide Trauma Informed Care Training on December 5, 2011 and December 7th from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm at our Department (Human Services Center, 500 Riverview Avenue, Waukesha, 53188). This training is highly recommended as its focus is on the impact of trauma on child development and some of the practical strategies and techniques caregivers can use when caring for children that have been exposed to trauma. Registration is through the Partnership. [www.southernpartnership.wisc.edu](http://www.southernpartnership.wisc.edu)

I want to thank our Deputy Director, Don Maurer for his dedication and commitment to serving our community. After 35 years of dedicated service, he will retire on November 30th. On behalf of all of my staff and our Department, we wish Don the best in his retirement.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and want to express my appreciation and thanks for all you do for the children and families in Waukesha County. In these challenges times, it's important that we assist those most in need.

Thanks,

Jesse



## Training Offered By Waukesha County

**Parent Café**  
November 17, 2011  
5:30 PM  
**Center for Excellence**  
N4W22000 Bluemound Road  
Waukesha

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



**Shared Parenting**  
November 19  
9:00 AM to 4:00 PM  
Elmbrook Church  
777 South Barker Road  
Brookfield, WI

Register online at: [southernpartnership.wisc.edu](http://southernpartnership.wisc.edu)  
Required training for foster parents licensed in 2010 and 2011



**Trauma Informed Care**  
December 5th or 7th  
5:30 PM  
Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services  
500 Riverview Avenue  
Brookfield Room  
Register online at: [southernpartnership.wisc.edu](http://southernpartnership.wisc.edu)

## Training

**Parents Place Programs**  
262-549-5575  
[www.ppacinc.org](http://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.

**Bullying (For Parent and Youth)**  
Wednesdays, November 2  
5:30 - 7:30 PM

**Teens Managing Anger**  
Mondays, November 7 & 14  
5:30 - 7:00 PM

**Journey to a Hate-free Millenium**  
Wednesdays, November 9  
5:30 - 7:00 PM

**Wednesday Workshops - Resources You Need to Know**  
Wednesday, November 16  
5:30 - 7:00 PM

**Love and Logic ®**  
Tuesdays, November 22 - December 20  
6:00 - 7:30 PM

**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, November 14, 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.

## Here Come the Holidays

Halloween has passed, and the winter holidays are almost upon us; symbols of merriment and good cheer are starting to appear. Many of us have mixed feelings about the holidays. However, for children in foster care, especially those who have recently been placed, these weeks may be full of more challenging feelings and experiences than for other children and families.

Since getting together with extended family and friends is a big part of the season, we have listed some ideas for helping families and children in foster care handle these get-togethers with a little less stress.

- Talk about the season; explain what events you celebrate and why. Describe what your holiday celebrations are like: noisy or quiet, formal or casual, large groups or small. Let the child share about his or her family celebrations and customs.
- Work with the birth family, if appropriate, to have the child spend time with his or her birth family or invite the birth family over for a gathering.
- Try to introduce children to members of your extended family in person before the major holiday gathering or show them pictures of people they might meet.
- Make sure there are gifts for children in foster care if there is a gift exchange. Some suggestions include: mittens, scarves, earrings, bracelets, fun socks, board games or common toys such as trucks or books. Give your family specific suggestions.
- Go over basic manners such as saying “please” and “thank you.” Explain the expectations of children prior to the celebration. Role-playing if you can; it can be fun and instructive.
- Remember: Information about children in foster care and their families is **CONFIDENTIAL**; remind children that they don’t have to talk about their particular situation with others, and let them know that you will be available to change the subject. Remind others that personal information about children in foster care and their birth families cannot be discussed.
- Be prepared for the sadness and grief that children in foster care may experience, and respect their feelings. Talk about their feelings in age appropriate ways, and give them time and space to grieve. Remember the grief takes many forms.

Open discussions and good preparation can make this holiday much more enjoyable for everyone—including you!

Many of these suggestions came from Carrie Craft who writes articles about foster care and adoption for About.com. See this article and others she has authored at:

<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>



### Foster Parents and Birth Parents: Working Together During the Holiday

Holidays and other special events allow foster parents the wonderful opportunity of creating lasting memories and continuing family traditions. However, holidays can stir up mixed feelings and conflicting emotions for children in foster care. Norma Schoenberg, foster and adoptive parent from Fond du Lac, volunteered to share her suggestions on how foster parents can effectively and positively interact with birth parents during the holidays.

- ★ **Develop positive relationships with the birth family.** Communication, consideration, and respect are essential components in promoting and enhancing positive working relationships with birth families. Talk to the children placed in your home and their birth parents about your family traditions and beliefs and theirs to help develop mutual understanding, encourage respect for one another and further build relationships.
- ★ **Encourage children to make cards and additional phone calls to their birth parents** during the holidays and other special occasions that occur throughout the year. If you participate in gift exchanges, never try to out-perform the birth parents. Remember that sentimental gifts, whether given or received, can be more valuable than any item that was purchased at a store.
- ★ **Give birth families the opportunity of celebrating the holiday with their children first** before their children celebrate with the foster family.
- ★ **Provide the child with a disposable camera** when they visit their family, especially during the holidays. When they return, you can develop the pictures for posting in their Life Book, and they can share special photo memories about times with their birth family.

## Religious Differences and the Holidays By John McMahon

Picture this scenario: Amy, a 13-year-old foster child, is crying hysterically. It is getting close to Christmas, and her foster mother has just told her that if she doesn’t attend church services on Christmas day, she cannot participate in an exchange of Christmas gifts with her foster family.

She desperately wants to participate, but she has decided not to — her birth family belongs to a religious tradition that does not go to church or celebrate Christmas. She feels excluded from her foster family and guilty because she wants to take part.

For foster families, the holidays can be challenging. Foster children miss their birth families and their traditions, while at the same time they may want to be a part of the activities of their foster family. When there is a religious difference between the child’s birth family and the foster family, things can become even more complicated.

Religion can be a sensitive issue. Legally, biological parents have the right to choose their children’s religion or lack of religion. Placement of their child in foster care does not take away this right.

Of course, most foster parents try to respect the culture and religious customs of the children in their care. But what does this mean when it comes to religion? Must a foster parent avoid talking about religion with foster children? Must foster children be excluded from holidays their birth family does not celebrate?

Answers to questions like these lie in establishing open lines of communication between you, DSS, and the birth family. If your foster care coordinator, social worker or licensing person knows how you feel about religious issues (for example, if prayer makes you feel uncomfortable, or if you feel compelled to convert foster children and their families), he or she will be able to make informed placement decisions.

This communication works both ways. The more you know about the religion, traditions, and preferences of birth families, the easier it will be for you to act in a way that honors their beliefs.

If you aren’t already doing so, consider talking with your social worker about how religion affects your role as a foster parent. Before you do so, you may want to survey your own beliefs and values before talking to your social worker or the child’s social worker. The box below contains questions that may help you through this process.

### What would you do if...

- Your foster child refused to attend your place of worship?
- Your foster child attempted to convert you?
- Birth parents talk badly about your religion to their children?
- Birth parents insist you cannot discuss religion with their child?
- Birth parents want a child to adhere to religious regulations or routines different from yours (for example, not eating pork, not cutting their hair)

Inspired by Schatz, M.S. & Horejsi, C. (1996). The importance of religious tolerance: A model for educating foster parents, *Child Welfare* (Jan.-Feb.), 73-86.



# November 2011 Foster Parent Spotlight

## Laura & Jerry Morrison



Laura and Jerry were high school sweethearts, who oddly enough, met through Jerry's ex-girlfriend. They've been married for 25 years and besides their foster children, have three kids of their own. Their kids are, Nicole, 25, Matthew, 22, and Christine, 20. They are the foster parents of their two grandchildren in addition to two other kids they've taken in.

Both from Milwaukee, Laura has been working at Roundy's for the last two years while Jerry has been working at Milwaukee County Transit System for the past 12 years. Their main support system includes each other as well as Jerry's Aunt

Shirley and Laura's mother. The family activities they like to do are camping, family vacations, (the most recent to New York and Disneyworld) , swimming, and tons of playing outside.

Laura describes her experience as being a foster parent as rewarding. With the one and two year olds she currently has, she has enjoyed watching them grow. She loves seeing the one year old's first steps, first words along with many other firsts, while experiencing the whole potty-training step with the two year old. Her most rewarding part of being a foster parent is knowing that they're helping a family out and making the kids feel safe in her home. She also wants to help guide the kids on the path to finding themselves.

Jerry and Laura's advice for other foster parents: "Take one day at a time, always aim to love and protect the kids, and show how much you care."



### Just a reminder...

- November 6, 2011 - Daylight Savings Time Ends
- Waukesha County is closed on Thursday, November 24, 2011 and Friday, November 25, 2011 for Thanksgiving Day and the Day After Thanksgiving .
- Waukesha County is closed on Friday, December 23, 2011 and Monday, December 26, 2011 for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
- Waukesha County is closed on Friday, December 30, 2011 and Monday, January 2, 2012 for New Years Eve and New Years Day.



### 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

### September 2011 Placements

Regular Foster Care:  
32 Children

Treatment Foster Care:  
14 Children

Group Homes:  
4 Children

Residential Care Facilities:  
10 Children

Relative Placements:  
49 Children

Level 2 Foster Homes:  
106 Homes

Level 1 Foster Homes:  
21 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other  
Counties  
18 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

Kate Flansburg ..... 262-896-6857

Laura Jahnke ..... 262-548-7359

Maria Maurer ..... 262-548-7345

Susan Peck..... 262-896-8574

Madeline Prange ..... 262-548-7394

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

### We Need You!

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

[srather@waukeshacounty.gov](mailto:srather@waukeshacounty.gov)

**262-548-7267**

Or visit our website at  
[www.waukeshacounty.gov](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov)  
And follow the links to  
foster care.

