



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
December 2011



Foster Children and Your Extended Family During the Holidays 7 Ways to Prepare Yourself, Your Family, and Your Foster Child

Holidays or big family gatherings are a tough situation for introducing your foster children to your extended family. Your extended family may feel uneasy about your choice to be a foster parent in the first place. Meeting the foster child/ren may help the situation or confirm their fears. Here are some things to consider when preparing your foster child and extended family for a gathering.

- **Try to introduce your new foster children before the main holiday or family event.** If this is not an option due to travel or time, try showing pictures of your extended family to your foster child and go through their names prior to the party.
- **Make sure to give the extended family time to be just with you and your child/ren.** Consider busying the foster child with a game or movie to give your children time to visit with a visiting Aunt. Some foster children are very attention seeking and may unknowingly “hog the show”. This may cause hard feelings within your family.
- **Remember confidentiality.** Most people care about the plight of children. Some may ask what seems to be harmless questions about why your foster children are in care, but to answer these questions would mean breaking the confidentiality of your foster child and his/her birth family. Politely tell your family that you appreciate their concern. Then explain how you know that they'll understand that keeping the children's past confidential provides them more security and respect.
- **Have gifts ready for the foster children at foster holiday gift exchanges.** Offer this to your extended family so that they don't feel obligated to add to their already long buying lists. If they are able and willing to buy for the children be sure to tell them a bit about the kids and their interests.

Here are a few easy gift ideas:

- ❄️ Cap, mittens, scarves
- ❄️ Watch
- ❄️ Earrings, necklace, bracelets
- ❄️ Basic toys—dolls, Barbie's, color books & crayons, action figures, trucks
- ❄️ Fun socks
- ❄️ Personal CD players and CDs. A good CD is NOW which has a variety of current hits.
- ❄️ Consider giving foster children gifts that will give them something to do at holiday get-togethers, like board games. This is especially needed if there are no kids their age at the parties. The kids may become bored.
- **Go over basic manners and rules prior to the get-together.** Go over 'Thank You', 'Please', and 'Excuse me'

and the situations in which to use these words. Remind the children to say 'Thank You' even if they don't like the gift. Go over other basics like no running in the house, table manners such as how food is passed, and chewing with their mouths closed. Consider practicing at home if time allows. Role plays can be fun.

- **Pre-teach about the party situation.** Go over the number of people that will probably attend. How loud it will be? We had a foster child who became frightened when she interpreted a loud game of cards as a fight. Will there be a toy room at the party? How about a room that kids are not allowed? Are there family rules that are well known that you need to inform the children about? For example an Aunt that doesn't allow visitors to wear shoes in the house.
- **Pre-teach about the season.** Do the children have a general knowledge about the holiday? Ask about their past holiday celebrations at home. Are they used to having a tree? Visiting Santa? Having a stocking? Do they understand the Easter season? Will seeing a Easter Pageant be scary for them? Some Easter Pageants can be quite graphic. They may be over whelmed if not scared by some traditional holiday events.

With a little bit of preparation family gatherings can be a joy for all involved.

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Just a reminder...

- 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.



Prospective Foster Parents need to do Part 1 of the training on the following website:
<http://www.wcws.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

Tuesday, December 6, 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

Training Offered By Waukesha County

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

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.

Adult Anger

Mondays, December 5 - 19

5:30 - 7:30 PM

Wednesday Workshops - Surviving the Holidays

Wednesday, December 21

5:30 - 7:00 PM

The Holidays in Foster Care

What behaviors might you see during this time?

- Frequent pouting
- Aggression—including hitting, biting, or kicking
- Whining
- Inconsolable crying
- Nightmares
- Suicidal ideations
- Old fears become new again
- Increase of temper outbursts

What can you do?

1. Meet together with your child's family to plan holiday schedules. Be sure to include any school productions your child might be involved in! If one particular date or event is special to you, speak up now. When you ask for a certain date, offer something in return. Compromise!
2. Ask your foster child or his parents about their family traditions and try to incorporate some into your family.
3. Exchange family recipes with your child's family at Thanksgiving time.
4. Coordinate gift giving! Work together to determine gifts to be purchased by your family and gifts to be purchased by the family of origin.
5. Share the load. You don't have to impress anyone!

What about me?

- Talk to other foster parents who can give you a boost. They share your pain!
- Call your Social Worker. He/she will help in anyway possible.
- Accept the fact that you won't please everyone. With so many people in your life, there is no way around it.
- Set the example of calm. Keep the children on daily routines. This will lessen their stress, which also lessens yours!
- Be flexible. Your level of calm becomes stressed when plans get canceled or changed. Be prepared with alternative plans.

Why are they doing this!

- Holidays mean family and for children who are not with their family, a time for remembering those they've said goodbye to.
- Your child's family is excited about the holidays and may try to "make up" for their child being in foster care.
- All families have good times. They can't explain it, but somewhere the memories remain.

Traditionally the holidays consist of presents and parties, decorations and dinners, but in foster care, they are also times of anger and annoyance as well as temper and trauma.

Keeping a cool head and a warm heart will enable your family, including your foster child, to survive the holidays!

Welcome to Jesse's Corner and first of all, I'd like to wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season and Happy New Year!

As many of you know in reading previous "Jesse's Corner" articles, I come from a big family, 1 of 12 siblings and as you can imagine, my parents struggled financially to provide for us throughout the year. The holiday season was especially challenging. As I think about my childhood experiences, I remember two volunteers from the Salvation Army coming to our house during the holiday season with food baskets and gifts for the children. When I think back to those times, I appreciate their efforts even more, because it made at least one young boy happy (me)! With that noted, I'd like to thank the many organizations and individuals that have assisted us throughout the year in meeting the needs of the families we work with, our foster children and foster parents. Without your help and assistance we would not have been as successful in meeting our goals and ensuring the safety and enhancing the well-being of our foster children. Please feel to extend my appreciation to your immediate family members, extended family, friends and anyone that assisted you during the year, good work!

As many of you may know, the Wisconsin legislature enacted various changes to the Concealed Carry Law in the State of Wisconsin in Wisconsin Act 35. Our local officials are reviewing these changes but it's my understanding that Waukesha County already has a zero tolerance workplace violence policy that prohibits most employees from possessing any weapon in the workplace. They will be looking into this further to see what if any changes will be made in the future. We'll keep you posted in future "Jesse Corner" articles. As you know, the foster home licensing rules are very clear about the need to secure and keep weapons away from children.

Wisconsin Administrative Code DCF § 56.08 (5) addresses the presence of weapons and ammunition in foster homes as follows:

DCF § 56.08(5): Firearms and other weapons.

- (a) Except as allowed under par. (d), no loaded may be kept in a foster home.
- (b) No unloaded firearm or other dangerous weapon may be kept in a foster home unless stored and locked in an area not readily accessible to foster children. Ammunition materials and firearms shall be stored in locked areas that are not readily accessible to foster children.

Please feel free to speak to Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator or Libby Sinclair, Level 1 Foster Home Licensor if you have specific questions. We want to ensure the safety of everyone who may be impacted by this new legislation.

In our attempt to offer more training opportunities for foster parents, we are providing the same 3 hour training on "Trauma Informed Care" to our foster parents on two separate dates, December 5th and December 7, 2011 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at our Human Services Building, 500 Riverview Avenue, Waukesha. You can sign up by registering through the Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership www.southernpartnership.edu

Thanks,

Jesse



Snow Day Activities for Foster Children

So, you just read or heard the announcement on the news, it's a snow day. The kids are cheering and all you can think about is the long list of things you need to get done. What are you going to do with your foster children or adopted children on a snow day? Here are some ideas for snow day activities for foster or adopted children that will keep them busy.

1. Watch Movies—This is the easiest answer to the snow day problem. I just wouldn't recommend this being the only snow day activity, unless you don't mind your children being zombied out. Look for movies with adoption or foster care themes. Now, you have time to discuss topics that come up.
2. Work on Lifebooks—I know I seem to talk about this a lot, but I only do so because it is that important to the kids. Snow days are a great time to work on lifebooks.
3. Let them Play in the Snow—Don't you remember your snow days? This is the best part!
4. Bake Cookies—Take some time and do something fun with the kids. Baking will not only warm up your house, but their hearts and tummies. Doing activities in the kitchen also teaches foster children and newly adopted children social skills as well as math skills such as measuring.
5. Clean Out Toys—Have the kids go through their toys and make piles for ones to keep, ones to donate, and ones to trash. You can come in at your leisure to investigate their progress. Great activity to do before the holidays so that there is room for new treasure. This also teaches kids how to give to others.
6. Reading—Make time for quiet reading. Look for books with an adoption or foster care theme. How about activities that go along with the story?
7. Draw Pictures—Pictures to decorate your refrigerator or that of a birthparent.
8. Decorate the Christmas Tree—If the season is near, go ahead and have the kids get into the holiday spirit by decorating the Christmas tree or other holiday decorations you may have waiting in boxes. This gives you the opportunity to discuss the holidays with foster children as many do not understand what the holidays are all about.
9. Cultural Time—This may be an excellent opportunity for the kids to take their time to explore their culture via the Internet or books you already have on hand.
10. Make a Craft—About.com has a wonderful resource with their Family Crafts Web site.
11. Make a Gift List—Give the kids some paper and have them list out items they want for the holidays or an upcoming birthday. Teach them how to think of others by making a list of gift ideas for their birth family.
12. Write Letters—This is a great time for the kids to write letters to their birth family.
13. Word Puzzles—Keep puzzles on hand for snow day emergencies. This activity is not only educational but teaches children how to entertain themselves.
14. Quiet Time—This is something we do every Sunday. Everyone goes to their room for a couple of hours during the afternoon. Reading, playing quietly or taking a nap is all permitted, as long as it's quiet.
15. Play Games—Kids love to play games, whether board games, card games, or ones they've made up. Games can be educational in so many ways. Foster children can learn needed social and communication skills.
16. Shovel Snow—Let the older kids get out and do some work, whether it be for you or an elderly neighbor. Another great lesson on service and thinking of others.



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Getting through the Holidays

Tip # 1—Stay connected to family and friends

Purchase or make cards to send out to family and friends during the holidays. It's a great time to create or update an address book. Be respectful of a foster family's privacy and check with them to see if you should place the return address of their house on the envelope or if you should use an alternative, like the address of the foster care agency (some people may have concerns about

the safety of the home if too many people have the address). Make phone calls to friends from an old neighborhood or to previous foster families.

Tip #2—Advocate for visits

Let your foster parents and caseworker know how important visits are to you during the holidays. Do what you can to help arrange the visits, whether that means being flexible with your schedule or helping to make the arrangements with those you wish to visit. Understand the holidays can be a busy time for everyone, so you may need to "remind" them frequently to do what it takes to get a visit arranged. If they need a little help in understanding where you're coming from, give them a copy of this publication to back you up!

Tip #3—Let 'em wag

If you're a dog lover, you're in a category with lots of other people who adore their pets. Throughout the holiday, the Humane Society often needs help in adopting out animals. During this rewarding work you can walk and bathe dogs, teach them new tricks, and help them find good homes. Some shelters hold photo sessions as fundraisers so pet owners can have their dog or cat pose with Santa. Check with your local shelter or pet store to see if they might be hosting a fundraiser of this kind and how you can assist them.

Tip #4—Connect at church

If you belong to a church, check into all the holiday activities that might be going on and join in! Activities around the holidays might include social gatherings, caroling (singing around the neighborhood), volunteer efforts and extra services. If you do not belong to a church but have been thinking about joining, the holidays can be a fun time to get involved.

Tip #5—Write on

If you like to write, keep a daily journal for the holiday season. Use your writing as a way to vent feelings, work through anxiety and worries, and reflect on the true meaning of the holidays. Some find it helpful to write "letters", even if they will never be sent, to loved ones you are missing or who have passed away.

Tip #6—Be yourself

Chances are you'll naturally be meeting and running into lots of people during the holiday season. The simplest things can connect you to someone, and one of the easiest places to get started is by being yourself and showing kindness. Compliments always make people feel special and recognized. Start by noticing something unusual or unique about the person. Admire a piece of jewelry, a tie they're wearing, or their impressive vocabulary. By pointing out something remarkable and singular, you can easily start up a conversation or make new friends.

Tip #7—Lend a hand

Volunteering can unite people with similar values. Offer to help the Salvation Army or local soup kitchen with their Christmas dinner. Hold reading sessions for kids at your local library or bookstore where you can read their favorite Christmas stories to them. If you're uncertain where to start, ask your foster parent, caseworker or a neighbor to help you research the possibilities (who knows—they may even join you!).

Tip #8—You'll make it

Everyone appreciates a homemade gift. Consider making holiday ornaments, knitting scarves, or crafting bookmarks. Search the internet for ideas and instructions about making inexpensive holiday crafts. Most everyone loves cookies or candies wrapped in pretty boxes.

Tip #9—Visit others who may feel alone

Older people in a retirement or nursing home may be away from loved ones during the holidays. Check with them or a local hospital to find out if there are people who would enjoy having company during the holidays. Consider bringing a favorite holiday story to read aloud or load your iPod with a favorite Christmas song (you may have to explain how you got the song there!).

Tip #10 Connect at FosterClub.com

Be sure to visit the FosterClub message boards at www.fosterclub.com and connect with your peers who may be feeling the same way. Post your feedback to an article written by a FosterClub All-Star at www.fosterclub.com/topics/kidslikeme.cfm. Let them know how you spend your holidays and give your own ideas about how to find your own joy during the season.



Happy Holidays!

December 2011 Foster Parent Spotlight

Mark and Rebecca Carroll



foster parents.

The couple has had one placement of a three-year-old child. Rebecca states that this was perfect because the child was the same age as their biological daughter. To her, it was like having twins. Their foster child was placed in their home in October 2010 and stayed until five months later.

According to Rebecca, there was not much interaction with the courts because the legal issues were, for the most part, settled before the child was placed in their home. The couple actively participated in taking the foster child to visits with the biological family and Mark plans to continue to do this even though the child is no longer placed in their home.

To Rebecca, the biggest reward of fostering is knowing that their family is providing a stable home for a child when he or she needs it the most. The toughest time of fostering for her family was when the honeymoon stage of having the child placed in their home was over. This was when they had to deal with temper tantrums and other changes in behavior.

Trainings helped Rebecca deal with the fostering process. She only wishes she had taken them earlier on in their fostering

Mark and Rebecca met in high school. They dated four years before they married on December 1, 2006. Rebecca states that she has wanted to foster for a long time so she and Mark waited until they were out of college and had a stable income to start the process of becoming

experience. Rebecca's advice for other families who are fostering is to be open and understanding with the child and their biological family.

★
**This
 Christmas
 end a quarrel.
 Seek out a forgotten
 friend. Dismiss suspicion,
 and replace it with trust
 Write a love letter. Share some
 treasure. Give a soft answer. En-
 courage youth. Manifest your loyalty in
 word and deed. Keep a promise. Find the
 time. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Listen.
 Apologize if you were wrong. Try to understand.
 Flout envy. Examine your demands on others. Think
 first of someone else. Appreciate. Be kind; be gentle.
 Laugh a little. Laugh a little more. Deserve confidence.
 Take up arms against malice. Decry complacency. Express your
 gratitude. Go to church. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart
 of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth.
 Speak your love.
 Speak it again.
 Speak it still once again.**

— Author Unknown

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

October 2011 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
43 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
14 Children

Group Homes:
5 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
7 Children

Relative Placements:
45 Children

Level 2 Foster Homes:
107 Homes

Level 1 Foster Homes:
24 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties
19 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

262-548-7267

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