

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
November 2012



Shared Parenting Can Reduce Disruptive Behaviors

By: Donna Foster

During my early years as a foster parent, the child welfare system believed children needed time without contact with their parents so they could adjust to the foster family. Most contact occurred only during supervised visits at the agency. Foster parents had little or no contact with birth families: their job was to take care of the children.

I regret the way we used to do things. I feel that when we fail to keep children close to their birth parents, we add to the trauma that led to foster care in the first place.

We cannot redo what's in the past. But we can learn from our mistakes and do better in the future. Today North Carolina and other states require and strongly support **shared parenting**, which involves foster parents and birth parents coming together to parent children in foster care. Because shared parenting is good for children, it can also help us address and reduce their difficult behaviors. Following are some common situations where shared parenting can help.

Placement

When children enter your home, everyone and everything is strange to them. They are wondering what they did wrong to make them leave their parents. They are afraid and confused. In this situation, possible child behaviors can include crying, screaming, shaking, running away, cursing, defiance, silence, bed-wetting, and fear (e.g., of the dark, the bathroom, people in the home). Here's what foster parents can do in this situation:

Call. Before the social worker leaves your home, get the birth parent's phone number and permission to make phone contact. If permission is denied for the child to talk to the birth parent, get permission to talk to the parents yourself.

Have empathy. When they enter your home, children don't need to see smiles and hear they are going to the zoo tomorrow. They need to hear you say that all of their feelings are okay here. You might say, "It must be scary being here. What can we do to make you less scared? You can ask us anything." Then, listen. Most children will ask about their parents and when they will go home.

Make it clear you care about the child's parents. Tell the child you will try and call his parents. "Your mom is upset too because she didn't want you to leave her. You are here with us while other people are helping your mom so she can take care of you again. I am going to let her know that you miss her. I bet your mama knows what you need at bedtime to help you asleep and she knows your favorite food. You want me to ask her? Tell me about your mom. What does she do to make you laugh?"

Get permission for the child to talk to the birth parent. Hearing a parent's voice will calm the child. True, the child may cry during or after the call, but the more he feels he can talk to his parent, the less upset he will be. In time, he won't need to make as many calls because he knows he can contact her. The more he hears his birth and foster parents having calm discussions concerning him, the sooner he will feel secure and safe.

Offer comfort items. These can include a nightlight, sleeping bags, their own toiletries, a tour of the house. Prepare an album about your family, with photos listing names and descriptions of rooms, people, and other helpful information for the child to review.

School and Elsewhere

At school, in the home, or elsewhere the child may be resistant, acting out, disoriented, defiant, withdrawn, fearful, etc. Although these behav-

iors can have many different causes, doing the following may help.

Hold a shared parenting meeting. At this meeting the social worker brings the foster and birth parents face-to-face. It will be easier if they have talked by phone first. The foster parent should ask the birth parent, "What questions do you have for me?" This will let the birth parent know you aren't there just to gain information, you are willing to give it, too. If the questions are too personal, look at the social worker. The social worker should say he is not comfortable giving out that information at this time. If the questions are not about the child, focus needs to be re-established.

Involve birth parents. Keep them informed about the child's positive and negative behaviors. Ask them for advice. Make a decision with them about what to do. If the child knows the birth and foster parents are united, he will not try to manipulate them into taking his side.

Mentor the birth parents. Do all you can to help the birth parents be stronger and healthier parents for their child. Ask them to come to meetings about the child. For instance, at school ask the teacher or counselor to talk to the child's parents. Be there to support and record the discussion. If you care about the child, you should care about his parents' ability to learn parenting skills.

Visits

Visits can be very emotional for children. Before and after visits you may find that children are defiant, crying, withdrawn, confused about which parents to align with, aggressive, disrupted in their eating and sleeping, etc. Here are some things that can help:

Before and during visits:

- Make a "Mama Box" with the child. The child puts in items he wants to share with his parent. When the visit is over, the parent encourages the child to find more things to bring to the next visit. The birth parent can bring to the visit a "Visit Box" with items from home. (Thanks to Judy Calloway for this idea!)
- Take photos of the birth family with the child. Make a copy for the birth parent. The child's copies can be placed in his life book and a copy framed for his room.
- With the birth parent, use a calendar to show the child when the next visit will be. The child can put a sticker on the calendar each day until the visit day.
- If the birth parent sends clothes, dress the child for the visit in those clothes.

What I Have Learned

When foster parents and birth parents participate in shared parenting, the child wins! This relationship can continue when the child goes home. I was surprised that I became friends with my children's birth parents. I was welcomed in their homes after their families were reunited.

When I showed them respect for being their child's parents and looked for shared parenting opportunities, the fight in them moved into doing what was required to get their family back together. I was not the enemy, but the advocate.

The negative behaviors of the parents and the children changed.

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Antwayne's Corner

Antwayne Robertson
Deputy Director of Waukesha
County Health & Human Services

Dear Foster Parents,

As the holiday season begins, I would like to wish a Happy Holiday Season to all of you, our "Shining Stars". It is truly an honor to have this opportunity to express my appreciation to you, our Foster Parents. Although the holiday season can be a difficult time for children in foster care, you are the ones who provide a loving and nurturing home, while attending to their pain and grief. Please know every child you have touched will know security, sincerity and compassion that each desperately needs and desires. It takes very special individuals to assume the foster parent role. Thank you being a foster parent. You may never know how you are changing or saving a child's life, but have faith and trust that you are. You are valued and appreciated!

Antwayne

Training Offered By Waukesha County

Parent Café

November 15, 2012
5:30 PM
Center for Excellence
N4W22000 Bluemound Road
Waukesha



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

Trauma Informed Parenting

For Waukesha County Resource Families
Sponsored by the Southern Partnership
Presented by Kathy Mullooly, LCSW
November 12, 2012 - Building a Safe Place
November 26, 2012 - Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors
December 3, 2012 - Connections and Healing
December 10, 2012 - Becoming an Advocate
December 17, 2012 - Taking Care of Yourself



All classes are in the Brookfield Room at Waukesha County Human Services. Enter Door 7.
Please park in the back employee parking lot.
All classes are from 5:30 to 8:30 PM.
Call Shari Rather to register at 262-548-7267.

Just a reminder...

- November 4, 2012 - Daylight Savings Time Ends
- Waukesha County is closed on Thursday, November 22, 2012 and Friday, November 23, 2012 for Thanksgiving Day and the Day After Thanksgiving .
- Waukesha County is closed on Monday, December 24, 2012 and Tuesday, December 25, 2012 for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
- Waukesha County is closed on Monday, December 31, 2012 and Tuesday, January 1, 2013 for New Years Eve and New Years



Implementing Shared Parenting

Highly recommended for all new foster parents
November 17, 2012
9:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Waukesha County Human Services Center
500 Riverview Avenue
Waukesha
Brookfield Room (Enter Door 6)
Register at the southernpartnership.wisc.edu

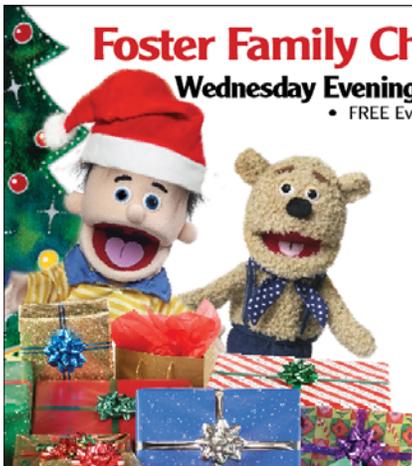
Training

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

Foster Family Christmas Party!
Wednesday Evening December 19, 7:00pm

- FREE Event for all Foster Families and Children!
- A Great Way to Celebrate Christmas!
 - Delicious BBQ Dinner Served!
 - Lots of Presents for all Children!
 - Huge Puppet Play and Caroling!
 - Fun for the Whole Family!

Please RSVP Today:
www.dayspringbaptist.com
or call: 262-404-5092



DaySpring is Easy to Find:
This Event held at the Excellence Center.
Across from Sams Club in Waukesha.

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

Tuesdays, November 6 - 27
6:00 - 7:30 PM

New Ideas for Parenting Children & Adolescents with ADHD/ADD
These classes will explore the five gifts of the ADHD/ADD child, and teach parental coaching skills that cultivate the child's emotional intelligence.

Tuesdays, November 13 - 27
6:00 - 7:30 PM

Love and Logic

Mondays, November 26 - December 17
5:30 - 7:30 PM

An Introduction to Trauma Informed Care

Who: Training will be led by Tim Grove, Chief Clinical Officer at St. Aemilian-Lakeside

When: Thursday, November 8, 2012, 5 - 9 p.m.
Light dinner will be served

Where: Capitol West Academy, 3939 N. 88th Street
Registration: Please contact our Community Engagement staff at 855-GROW HOPE or growhope@st-al.org and provide the following information: Name, Address (including city, state and zip), e-mail address, and phone number.



Shared Parenting Can Reduce Disruptive Behaviors Continued from Page 1

After visits:

- Arrange for the child to talk to his parent by phone.
- The birth parent can share with the foster parent and social worker any of the close relationships the child has so they can be contacted. These people can continue their relationships with the child. Examples: extended family members, teachers and neighbors.
- Ask the child to share his favorite parts of the visit.
- Be understanding. If the child doesn't want to eat the next meal, have a light snack instead. The child may have eaten snacks at the visit or the child's emotions may make him unable to eat.

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Parent-Child Visits: Managing the Challenges, Reaping the Rewards

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

The 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, a complex scheduling and logistics, and other challenges.

Luckily, there are things you can do to make parent-child visits easier for yourself and the children in your care. First, however, it helps 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 providers need to know how to manage the challenges that surround visits. To provide you with concrete suggestions in this area, listed 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.

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Understanding the Child's Response to Birth Parents 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:

- Nightmare 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.
- 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.

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Understanding the Child's Response to Birth Parents Visits

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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 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 schedule.
- 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 visit 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, children, youth, and families from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development are also available online at www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family.

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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

Rebecca Hollister, 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 2012 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
34 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
10 Children

Group Homes:
3 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
8 Children

Relative Placements:
56 Children

Level 2 Foster Homes:
117 Homes

Level 1 Foster Homes:
36 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties
23 Homes

If an Allegation of Abuse or Neglect has been made against you, 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

Laura Jahnke 262-548-7359

Becca Kuester 262-896-6857

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

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 Saфро
Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury
Lexus•Infiniti•Scion