



# Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County  
Health & Human Services  
August 2010



## Foster Care - Training - Separation and Loss

By: PSG (Professional Services Group) CIP (Community Impact Programs) Website

<http://www.psgcip.com/FosterCare/Training/SeparationAndLoss.php>

(Hold down the CTRL Key and select the Hyperlink to take you to the website.)

To receive one training credit, please read the article below and answer the questions on the website listed above. **To receive training credit, forward completed questions to Shari Rather.**

The best start in life is to be born to parents who love you and are capable of caring for you until you are mature enough to care for yourself. It is what most children take for granted. Children who are in foster care do not have this support. They hurt. They know something is missing. Something is wrong. Every child who comes into foster care is in emotional pain.

Whenever we lose someone or something which is important to us, we suffer from loss. If you have experienced death or divorce or the break-up of any important relationship, you have suffered emotional hurt. You felt lonely, you felt rejected. At times you were angry about being deserted. You went through periods of feeling guilty and wondered what you might have done to cause the separation or what you might have done to prevent it. Sometimes when you were preoccupied with your own thoughts you may have found it difficult to go about doing your daily tasks. You may have found yourself irritable with others. Maybe you snapped at them when they had not really done anything to warrant such a reaction. It took a long time before you felt like taking part in normal activities again.

You might have known such suffering as an adult. Imagine what it must be like for a child to lose those, the ones they have learned to depend on.

The children who come into our care have suffered at least the loss of their parents. If this is not the first placement, they have suffered the loss of parent substitutes. Many have also lost the support of their siblings. They have been separated from the place they knew as home. They have also lost many of the things they owned. When we stop to think about how much they have lost, we find it amazing they are able to adjust at all. Some never do.

As foster parents, you cannot bear the responsibility for the children's problems. You did not cause them and there is no way you can possibly make up for all of them. But there are many things you can do to help children face their pain, understand it and compensate for it.

Your first task is to recognize the severity of their pain. This is not easy. We do not like to see children in pain. In fact, one of the most important reasons you chose to become a foster parent is because you do not want children to suffer.

Facing pain with a child can make us very uncomfortable. Even as we comfort, we wish the pain would just go away. It is almost an instinctive reaction. Remember the last time you were caring for a crying infant? You checked to see if the baby was hungry, wet, or cold. After you did the things you hoped would make the child comfortable, you probably picked him up or placed him over your shoulder, gently patted the child's back and whispered softly *Shh, shh. There now, don't cry.*

Love and comfort will help, but as Professional Parents you will be expected to do more. If the children are to benefit from placement, they must be helped to face the pain which is the inevitable result of separation.

The social worker will be trying to help your foster children with their feelings. But you will be the one who spends the most time with them. Unless you are part of the overall treatment plan, it will not be as effective. You are in a better position to observe the child's progress and to give on the spot comfort and understanding.

Giving true comfort cannot be accomplished by pretending there is no pain. It can be accomplished by letting the child know you understand.

One of the ways to show your understanding is by keeping the losses to a minimum. This can be done by allowing children to keep as much of their past as possible. If it will help, allow the children to bring some of their things from home. These may include toys, clothes, or their own blankets. Perhaps they can have some of the same foods and as much of their previous routine as is reasonable.

Most of all, you can help children keep alive their memories both good and bad. This is very important because if children are to profit from placement, they must understand and sort out their mixed feelings. They must be able to freely express their love, their hatred, and their fears.

No matter how miserable the past is it is never totally negative. Children may cling to the very slightest evidence that they were treated well. You may sometimes find it difficult to understand how children can idolize relationships which you know were far from ideal. Sometimes it is even more difficult to hear children berate their parents. We do not like to think about parents' cruelty to their children. But if the children are not allowed to talk about their mixed feelings, they will not learn to understand themselves. If they are then led to believe these very normal feelings should be hidden, they will feel something is wrong with them. Their self-esteem will suffer.

You can help by allowing children to speak freely and by not being judgmental. There is no need for you to justify any of their parents' undesirable behavior. There is a need for you to let the children know it is normal for them to have mixed feelings about themselves and their parents. When they know their feelings are acceptable, they begin to sort them out. This is a very slow process and needs to be repeated again and again.

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### Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

Monday, August 2, 2010 6-9 PM  
Monday, August 9, 2010 6-9 PM

Monday, September 13, 2010 6-9 PM  
Monday, September 20, 2010 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

### RESPIRE HOMES NEEDED

As you know, we use many tools to try to keep children at home and families intact. Research and experience has shown us that one of the most effective tools to accomplish that is routine respite provided to families. Sometimes, the need for respite is the parents'. They are just plain tired and need a break from the stresses of full time caregiving for high-needs child. Sometimes, the need belongs to the child in that they need a break from the stresses and tension in the home. Many times, it is both. Counties also have available to them a program called the *Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Waiver*. Simply put, it is a Federal/State funding source that is available to provide extra funding to pay for support services for some of these higher-needs kids. Because of this funding, we can pay a higher rate for the respite services that these children receive.

We realize that the term "higher-needs" may cause you to take pause. We understand that you would have questions about what that term implies, and are committed to answering your questions as completely as possible before you would make any sort of commitment. The needs can be physical, developmental or emotional. We would talk with you in detail about any child that you were considering for respite, so that you knew as much as possible what commitment was being asked of you.

If you are interested, please contact Shari Rather (262-548-7267).

Jesse

## 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.

### Teenagers: A Parent's Nightmare?

Mondays, August 2 - 30  
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Teenagers often present parents with extraordinary challenges. Is your teen out of control? Have you tried everything and nothing improves the situation? Are you feeling frustrated and hopeless? Join us for a 5-week session for changing your teen's anger and defiance into responsible co-operation. Parents are encouraged to bring their teen to the last session on August 30th.

### A Support & Educational Program for Parents with Children Facing Multiple Challenges

This class is on-going and meets every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month from 6 - 7:30 p.m.

This is a support and education program for parents who have children experiencing the following:

- Attention deficits
- Anger management problems
- Sensory integration issues
- Poor social skills & self-esteem issues

Parents will gain support, share experiences, learn about new resources and listen to experts on several topics.

The child's class will meet separate from parents and offer education focused on each child's developmental stage. Through art and play activities, they will build self-esteem, social and organization skills.

### Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership

<http://southernpartnership.wisc.edu/>

### Navigating the Safe Use of Technology

Safety in the Age of Digital Communications  
August 11, 2010

8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

At Country Springs in Pewaukee

Register at <http://southernpartnership.wisc.edu/>

## Training Offered By Waukesha County



### Foundation Training Fall 2010

#### September 11, 2010

Partners in Permanency 9:00 to 12:00  
Cultural Issues in Placement 12:30 to 3:30

#### September 16, 2010

Child Abuse and Neglect 6:15 to 9:15

#### September 25, 2010

Guidance and Positive Discipline 9:00 to 12:00  
Family Connectiveness 12:30 to 3:30

#### September 30, 2010

Child Development 6:15 to 9:15

#### October 9, 2010

Attachment 9:00 to 12:00  
Placement and Separation 12:30 to 3:30

#### October 14, 2010

Sexual Abuse 6:15 to 9:15

#### October 28, 2010

Effects of Fostering on the Family  
Potluck  
6:00 to 9:15

Call Shari Rather to register at 262-548-7267  
All Classes are at Waukesha County Health and Human Services  
Enter at Door 6

## Preparing for a Respite Stay

Be clear with the child. Explain why the respite stay is occurring (e.g., so you can rest) and how long the respite period will last. Ask about any concerns the child has, and be clear that this is not another placement.



Visit the respite provider. If possible, take your child to visit the respite family. Familiarizing the child with the respite provider and environment may reduce the child's anxiety and make the respite period more fun.



Share information with the provider. If you can't visit, talk with them. Tell them about your child's likes and dislikes, usual schedule, medical needs, and any other issues or concerns you think they should know about.

Gather information from the provider. Find out about any special activities (swimming, picnics, etc.) planned for the respite period. Sharing this information with your child will help her look forward to the respite stay and help you pack appropriately (e.g., swimsuit).



Talk about discipline issues with the respite provider. Most providers are willing to follow through with your discipline approach, but talk to them first before taking away privileges that may be part of the weekend plan for the whole respite family (e.g., swimming, a picnic).

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When you accept children's feelings, you are accepting the children. When you accept the children, you are helping them to accept themselves.

### When a Child Returns Home

We have seen that it can be very difficult to prepare a child to move back with their family. You have always known it was a possibility, but that does not seem to make it any easier. You know the child who came into your home did not come from an ideal home and you are very concerned about his returning there. You have worked so hard to help the child with many problems. You have come to love the child and have seen many chances. Now you are afraid of a slide backwards and it feels as though all you have done is for nothing. You will find it hard to understand how the agency can return the child to the parent's home.

You cannot see any evidence of change. There have been changes, even though the changes may not have been as great as you would like. It may help to think about the possible changes.

Sometimes when people have severe problems are helped to get themselves together when they have a chance to work on those problems without daily pressure of the daily care of the child. They may have undergone counseling and have learned to feel better about themselves. If they do feel better about themselves, it will be easier for them not to use the child as a scapegoat for their own problems. If they have been helped by the agency, they now know this is a resource they can use in the future.

The most important change of all is the change in the child who has now had more experience outside the home. The child has known you and others like you, and now has more models to chose from as he decides what kind of an adult he wants to become. He is older and can better protect himself. He knows how to get help if it is needed.

Children should not be deprived of being with their families except for the gravest of reasons. By being with their own families, children have the best chance to truly know their parents and to understand their own place in the scheme of things. This is very important for healthy emotional development.

What you have given the children will never be lost. You have been with them, have understood and comforted them through one of the most painful periods of their lives...that time when they had to live away from their parents.

## Griefwork in the Child Welfare System By Deborah Weising

Wordless grief. The kind that goes so bone deep there are no words to express it, nor can anyone else say anything to comfort it. That grief is the expression of so many of those involved with the child welfare system: children, foster and adoptive parents, child welfare professionals, and of course birth parents.

Why does this system that seeks to offer hope for at-risk children and families end up being such a place of grief?

### Children and Foster Parents

Foster parents enter the system with a dream: to provide a home and family for a child who is traumatized. Foster families frequently have a background that includes a childhood grief that allows them to identify with the painful, angry, lost look in the eyes of children in foster care. Some families hope to adopt and have been through the deep grief of infertility, or lost children through tragedy. But the common thread that links most foster parents is the desire to answer the grief cry of so many children.

Yet as foster families get more deeply involved with the child welfare system, they find it fragmented, with constantly changing workers and guardians ad litem. They face the daunting task of navigating their own emotions, the impact of fostering on other members of their family, and the stress to their own support system. It can be a confusing, angering experience. Fostering doesn't come with an easy-to-read road map.

Deeper mysteries occur in foster families, too: the child's grief and their own unresolved grief can collide into strange family dynamics. The child's deep pain and loss of their birth family runs in waves through the child's being. How can a child settle into a foster home when his or her identity and sense of worth are tied to the birth family? Children are not given a road map to foster care, either.

"Shared parenting" is the term used to describe the foster parent's role of caring for children while supporting their connection with their birth parents and the goal of reunification. Yet when the child goes home the foster parents' pain can be intense, particularly if they hoped to adopt the child or if they are

concerned the child's birth family is not equipped or committed to the child's welfare.

What can foster parents do when they find themselves struggling after a reunification? Grieve with courage. Take solace in the fact that you make a difference in the lives of children and families. You have acted for the good of our most fragile children and families. Engage in the work of grief. Ultimately, foster parenting is the work of love and the decision to stand for the good of others in a very messy human system. It is natural to feel sad, angry, disappointed, and confused. That is the work of grief. It's the soul's process of seeing the truth. And the truth is that advocating for children and families can be a sacrificial calling that may never make sense to those who insist on avoiding pain. But as you work through the grief, also reclaim your strength, talents, goodness, drive, and charity. You are wiser and stronger now, and your heart has grown fuller.

### Adoptive Parents

When children are adopted they bring their entire experience, heredity, and grief into the adoptive family. It can be a long, hard, costly battle for all members of the family to regain balance.

Unfortunately, adoptive families need more support and training than is available through social services, and frequently deal with children whose emotional issues are beyond the family's understanding or ability to handle.

The good news is, you can often find the resources you need within the adoption community itself. Adoptive families have begun to organize web communities, support groups, prayer groups, and associations that genuinely tackle the deeper issues of adoption. But you have to be willing to reach out and connect! Be willing to share your experience and issues with other adoptive families. Be willing to strengthen your marriage, look at your losses, and reaffirm that adoption is a viable option for healthy families.

Grief, rage, depression, resolution: all these phases can help adoptive families reaffirm their identity, their own health and worth, and their desire to love children regardless of whether they ultimately adopt. And for those who do adopt, the pain involved is an invitation to press through those deep adoption issues that force us to relate to others in a real, non-defensive, vulnerable way. Adoptive family networks are places of healing, advocacy, help, education, and action to make a difference in our world.

### There Is Hope

Ultimately, this is a message of hope. If you are grieving, dig deep. There is hope in the same heart that is motivated to help, love, build community, and validate the worth of dignity of human life.

Foster parents must acknowledge that their work requires a huge support network, deep abiding faith, skills to recognize when they need help, and the ability to accept that some important things connected with foster care are beyond their control. Foster families get involved, get a big helping of grief, and then have to decide if the lives and welfare of children are worth their own personal pain.

Of course children's lives are worth it: but never underestimate the cost. Foster parents will hopefully build a support system with other foster and adoptive parents that is much deeper than social services.

Government cannot be our sole support system, sole source of training, and solution for the issues we encounter. We become the solutions by going much deeper, and refusing to let children be forever without a family or home. Foster families also have to gain wisdom about the needs of their own families, and understand and test their own motivations. A life calling is often a call to overcome pain in our early lives and become a helping hand to others.

Caseworkers quit in droves. But their skills are so needed. Dig deep. Creativity will come not from the top ranks of government, but from grassroots workers who have seen firsthand the brokenness and needs of individuals and families. Rethink! Reinvent! Social services, more than ever, needs partnerships with nonprofits and faith communities. Have you considered writing about your experience, or organizing research and experimental models? Don't throw away your insight and experience, get busy and use it!

What about the children? They count on all of us to rethink the idea that government solutions are effective apart from community solutions. The faith community in particular is most likely to tackle the breadth of issues affecting the destruction of families and children.

Where do we start? Start by wiping the tear from the face of an injured or forgotten child, or encouraging a single parent who is spiraling into homelessness, or lend guidance to someone with an addiction, or vote for those who are committed to life-affirming policies. Enter the depths of grief, and come out with a love that is tough, real, ready to allow for pain, and never gives up. The resolution of grief that has no words is the decision to love beyond pain. Look in the mirror: are you there yet?

# August 2010 Foster Parent Spotlight

## Kyle & Vickey Moore



Kyle and Vickey have been foster parents for just under a year. When they first thought about expanding their family through foster parenting, they were a bit apprehensive. They began filling out their paperwork after watching the HBO mini-series, "The Wire", but debated turning it in for about a year.

One of their concerns was how fostering would affect their family. With encouragement from their friends, Lauren and Shane, who have experience with foster parenting and adoption, Kyle and Vickey decided to turn in their paperwork and become foster parents.

Kyle was born and raised in Sheboygan, WI and Vickey was born and raised in Grant Park, Illinois. The couple now lives in Hartland. They met in 1999 when they were camp counselors at Easter Seals Camp Wawbeek in Wisconsin Dells. A year later, Kyle proposed to Vickey and 2 years later they were married. They have one son named Nate who is 3. Nate enjoys water parks, trains, and getting spoiled by his grandparents. As a family, the Moores love running, reading, and camping together.

Kyle is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher at Richmond School, where he has worked for 10 years. He also coaches boys basketball at Waukesha North High School and is currently going back to school for his administration license. Vickey is a speech-language pathologist at Hillside Elementary in the Elmbrook School District. She has worked there for 6 years. Kyle and Vickey have had one placement since becoming licensed – a 2-year-old girl who was 'full of spunk and very chatty'. At first there was a period of adjustment for the whole family. Vickey compared this time to 'having instant twins', since Nate and their foster daughter were so close in age. Soon, Vickey and Kyle adjusted to their new family routines and began to really enjoy the time they had with their foster daughter by taking tons of pictures to document the time they had together.

Vickey and Kyle describe their first fostering experience as challenging and exciting. They have found that the most difficult part of fostering is the time required for parent visitations and meetings. The most rewarding part of being a foster parent has been watching their foster child grow emotionally, socially, and academically. Vickey and Kyle

were pleasantly surprised to see their family grow and bond in ways they hadn't expected. Some of the other things this family has enjoyed about fostering have been working with their foster daughter's extended family to put together a baby book with a lot of pictures and seeing their foster daughter return home.

The Moores have learned a lot from their experience and the foundation trainings they attended. However, the stories from other foster parents have been the most helpful. The best piece of advice that Vickey and Kyle have to offer is to learn as much as possible about the family history of their foster child. The Moores are glad that their family has the opportunity to be a foster family. If you ask Nate where babies come from, his response is that they come from Shari!



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

"An Afternoon with the Animals"

on

August 4, 2010

3:00 to 8:30

Dinner at 5:45

Oak Grove Picnic Area

See you there!

Milwaukee County Zoo

Reserve your spot by calling

Shari Rather@ 262-548-7267 or Danielle Dickey @ 262-896-6857



#### 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  
Judy David..... 414-461-5403  
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

#### June 2010 Placements

Regular Foster Care:  
48 Children

Treatment Foster Care:  
18 Children

Group Homes:  
3 Children

Residential Care Facilities:  
11 Children

Relative Placements:  
40 Children

Total Homes Assisting Other  
Counties  
15 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

Angie Briggs ..... 262-548-7275

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

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

Janice 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](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov)  
And follow the links to foster care.



Let us host or cater your next special event! Check out our menus online at [machineshed.com](http://machineshed.com) or stop on in! 262-523-1322

