



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
December 2009



10 Tips for Youth in Foster Care for Getting Through the Holidays

By Foster Club, Inc.

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 your 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. (Get your family's OK first).

2. **Speak up 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, by being flexible with your schedule or helping to make the arrangements with those you wish to visit. Understand that the holidays can be a busy time for everyone, so you may need to "remind" foster parents 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!

3. **Let 'em wag**

If you're feeling a little lonesome and if you're a dog lover, you're in a category with lots of other people who adore pets. Throughout the holidays, your Humane Society may need 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.

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 one, the holidays can be a fun time to get acquainted with a church or churches in your community.

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 to reflect on the true meaning of the holidays. Some find it helpful to write "letter", even if they will never be sent, to loved ones you are missing or who have passed away. If you are inclined, you can send your stories to info@fosterclub.com.

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 their jewelry, or shoes they're wearing, or their impressive vocabulary. By pointing out something remarkable and singular, you can easily start up a conversation or make a new friend.

7. **Lend a hand**

Volunteering can unite people with similar values. Offer to help the Salvation Army with their Christmas dinner for needy people. Hold reading sessions for kids at your local library or bookstore where you can read their favorite holiday 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!).

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 homemade cookies and candies wrapped in pretty boxes. And in case you can't think of anyone in the whole world who would love your delicious and yummy homemade cookies, FosterClub's address is 753 First Avenue, Seaside, OR 97138. =)

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 the home 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!).

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 winter blues or struggling with the holidays. Post your feedback to an article written by a FosterClub AllStar at www.fosterclub.com/topics/kidsLikeMe.cfm. Let us know how you spend the holidays and give your own ideas about how to find your own peace during the season.

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Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

I recently celebrated my 29th anniversary working for Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services. As some of you may know, all of my work experience has been in child welfare, beginning as a foster care social worker, moving to the supervisor of the Parent Services Unit and being promoted to the manager of the Children and Family Division in 2002. Throughout the years I've seen many changes and enjoyed working with everyone however I've always wondered what happened to the children, youth, families and foster families that I've met over the years. During the past couple of months I've received several phone calls and letters from former foster children. As you can imagine they were teenagers when I worked with them and now they are in their early or mid forty's and have experienced a lot since they left our child welfare system. Several of them contacted me and share their appreciation and support for the work we've done helping them along the way. Some acknowledged that when they were younger they "knew everything" and were going to do what they wanted but in retrospect admitted they didn't know as much as they thought. One mentioned her positive relationship with her foster parent and that they still see each other. Most of them acknowledge the impact their childhood experience of abuse and neglect had on their lives but appreciated the support and care they got from their foster parents and others. I see resiliency in these individuals and more importantly, they are survivors who have and are trying to make a better life for themselves and their children, although it hasn't been easy. Some of them have offered to speak to foster parents and our staff about their experience in our child welfare system and the impact child abuse and neglect had on them. I will carefully consider their request and determine if and how they could assist us in our continuing effort to provide safety, permanency and ensuring the well-being of children in our child welfare system. I continue to believe that "we" can and do make a positive impact in the lives of children and families that we work with. I want to thank all the staff, foster parents, community providers, legal representatives, Judges and everyone that worked collaboratively with me over the past 29 years in providing child welfare services. YOU do make a difference! Good job!

I want to wish everyone Happy Holiday Season and thank you for your generosity and support of children and families in Waukesha County.

Jesse

**Pre-Placement Training
for Prospective Foster Parents**

No Pre-Placement Training in December

Tuesday, January 5, 2010 6-9 PM
Tuesday, January 12, 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.

Training

Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services Presents Foster Parent Foundation Training Winter Session 2010

Saturday January 9, 2010
Partners in Permanency

9-12
Cultural Issues in Placement
1-4

Saturday January 23, 2010
Maintaining Family Connectiveness

9-12
Guidance and Positive Discipline
1-4

Saturday February 6, 2010
Dynamics of Abuse and Neglect

9-12
Impact of Trauma on Child Development
1-4

Saturday February 20, 2010
Attachment

9-12
Placement and Separation
1-4

Saturday March 6, 2010
Dynamics of Sexual Abuse

9-12
Effects of Fostering on the Family
1-4

**All Classes are held at Health and Human Services in the Brookfield Room . Enter the Agency at Door #6.
Call Shari Rather to register 262-548-7267**



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.

Controlling Conflict in the Family

Mondays, November 30 - December 21
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Conflict resolution and anger management aim at peaceful resolutions when the storms are raging. Learn positive ways to control conflict and keep the peace in your family.

Teenagers: A Parent's Nightmare

Mondays, January 4 - 25
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 4-week session for changing your teen's anger and defiance into responsible cooperation.



12 Ideas for Supportive Adults to Help Their Young Person Through the Holidays

By FosterClub, Inc.

- 1. Prepare the foster youth in your care for the holidays in your home**

Have a discussion with the young person about your family's holiday customs. Do you celebrate over multiple days, or is there one "main" celebration? Are there religious customs? Will gifts be exchanged? What should they wear? Who will they meet? What preparations need to be done in advance? Will there be visitors to the home? Will they be taken on visits to the homes of other family or friends? And in all of these events, will your youth be expected to participate? Knowing what to expect will help to decrease anxiety around the holidays. Avoid surprises and you will decrease seasonal tensions.
- 2. Prepare friends and family before your visit**

Let people know in advance about new family members in your home. Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a "new" foster youth may set up an awkward situation—such as a scramble to set an extra place at the table—making the young person feel like an imposition right from the start of the visit. Your preparation of friends should help cut down on awkward, but reasonable questions such as "who are you?" or "where did you come from?"
- 3. Remember confidentiality**

You may receive well intended but prying questions from those you visit with over the holidays. If your young person is new to your home, it is natural that family members ask questions about your youth's background. Understand that questions are generally not meant to be insensitive or rude, but simply come from a place of not knowing much about foster care. Think in advance about how to answer these questions, while maintaining your youth's confidentiality. Use the opportunity to educate interested family and friends. Discuss with your young person how they would like to be introduced and what is appropriate to share about their history with your family and friends. (Remember, they have no obligation to reveal their past.)
- 4. Arrange meeting your family in advance, if possible**

The hustle and bustle of the holidays can make it particularly chaotic for your young person to participate in your family traditions. Anxiety may run high for young people already, and the stress of meeting your relatives may be a lot to deal with. If possible, you can arrange a casual "meeting" in advance of "main events." If it is not possible or practical to meet beforehand, make a list of names of some of the people they'll meet and their connection to you. You can also encourage a quick call from relatives you plan to visit to deliver a personal message of "we are excited to meet you" so that your youth knows they will be welcome.
- 5. Have extra presents ready to help offset differences**

It should not be expected that all relatives purchase presents for your youth. Be prepared with other small gifts and for those family members that express concern over not having brought a gift, offer one of your "backups" for them to place under the tree. Extra presents may be addressed "from Santa", even for older youth, to help offset a larger number of gifts other children may receive at the same time. Children often keep count of the number of gifts received (right or wrong) and use it to compare with other kids, so sometimes quantity is important.
- 6. Facilitate visits with loved ones**

The holidays can be a busy time for everyone including foster parents and caseworkers. But it is especially important during this time of year to help your young person arrange for visits with loved ones. Don't allow busy schedules to mean the postponement of these important visits. Try to get permission for your youth to make phone calls to relatives (if long distance charges are an issue, ask if calls can be placed from the foster care agency or provide a local business or individual to "donate" by allowing the use of their phone). A youth may wish to extend holiday wishes to relatives and friends from an old neighborhood, but may need your help getting phone numbers together. Use the opportunity to help the youth develop their own address book.
- 7. Help them make sure their loved ones are okay**

Young people may worry that their family members are struggling through the holidays. If homelessness has been a regular issue, the winter season may bring cold weather and extreme hardship. Your youth may experience guilt if they feel a loved one is struggling while they, the youth,



are living in comfort. Knowing that a biological parent or sibling has shelter from the cold or has their other basic needs met may ease a young person's mind through the always emotional holidays.

- 8. Extend an invitation**

If it is safe and allowed by your foster care agency, consider extending an invitation to siblings or bio-parents through the holidays. It need not be an invitation to your "main" holiday event, consider a "special" dinner for your youth to celebrate with their loved ones. If this not a possibility to do within your home, consider arranging a visit at a local restaurant (ask the caseworker if it would be appropriate for the visit to be unsupervised or if your supervision would suffice). Extending an invitation to their loved ones need not signal to a young person that you support their bio-family's lifestyle or choices—rather it tells a young person that you respect their wish to stay connected to family. You will also send a message to the youth that that aren't being put in a position to "choose" your family over their bio-family and that it is possible to have a relationship with all the people they care about.
- 9. Understand and encourage your youth's own traditions and beliefs**

Encourage discussion about the holiday traditions your young person experienced prior to being in foster care, or even celebrations they liked while living with other foster families. Incorporate the traditions the youth cherishes into your own family celebration, if possible. Use the opportunity to investigate the youth's culture and research customary traditions. If the young person holds a religious belief different from yours, or if their family did, check into the traditions customarily surrounding those beliefs.
- 10. Assist in purchasing or making holiday gifts or in sending cards to their family and friends**

Allow young people to purchase small gifts for their relatives, or help them craft homemade gifts for their relatives, or help them craft homemade gifts. Help send holiday cards to those that they want to stay connected with. The list of people that your youth wishes to send cards and gifts to should be left completely to the youth, although precautions may be taken to ensure safety (for example, a return address may be left off the package, or use the address of the foster care agency) and compliance with any court orders.
- 11. Understand if they pull away**

Despite your best efforts, a young person may simply withdraw during the holidays. Understand that this detachment most likely is not intended to be an insult or a reflection of how they feel about us, but rather is their own coping mechanism. Allow for "downtime" during the holidays that will allow the youth some time to themselves if they need it (although some youth would prefer to stay busy to keep their mind off other things—you will need to make a decision based on your knowledge of the young person). Be sure to fit in one-on-one time, personal time for your youth and you to talk through what they are feeling during this emotional and often confusing time of year.
- 12. Call youth who formerly lived with you**

The holidays can be a particularly tough time for youth who have recently aged out of foster care. They may not have people to visit or a place to go for holidays. In addition, young people commonly struggle financially when they first leave foster care. A single phone call may lift their spirits and signal that you continue to care for them and treasure their friendship. Be sure to include these youth on your own holiday card list. A small token or gift basket of homemade holiday goodies may be especially appreciated.

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We encourage you and your family to get your seasonal flu shot and the H₁N₁ flu shot. If you have a foster care placement, we require a parent or legal guardian to sign the authorization forms for one or both of the flu shots. As always, please consult your doctor and review any concerns with your social worker.

December 2009 Foster Parent Spotlight

Tina & Pat Polster



Tina and Pat are both originally from the Dousman area. They initially met in high school. They have been together since 1981 and have been married for 23 years. Pat is employed at Metaltek in Waukesha, while Tina is employed at Fiserv in Brookfield. They both have worked 6 years with their employers. Tina and Pat have two daughters, Gabrielle, who is 21 and Chelsea, who is 15. The family enjoys bowling in their spare time. Tina and Pat enrolled their girls in junior bowling league when they were six and five years old. Chelsea is still a part of the league today. The family prefers to bowl at Fracaro's Lanes, here in Waukesha.

Tina and Pat both were interested in foster care for a long time before they initially began fostering. One of their daughters has a chronic illness and before they could invest in fostering, the needs of their daughter were a priority. Once their daughter was successfully making her own way, Tina and Pat were able to consider the possibility of fostering. Tina and Pat have completed all of the pre-placement trainings and are currently taking additional classes. Tina also has trained in Madison in order to assist in training for pre-placement in Waukesha. They began fostering in August 2008 and have had three placements. They currently have one placement at this time.

Tina and Pat find the most difficult aspects of fostering to be "the struggle that the children go through once they have been removed from their homes and the adjustment to your home. It is very difficult sometimes when they are young, to understand. It takes time for them to adjust to the rules and changes in routine, but they come to understand the need for that and adjust quickly" to your own home. Tina and Pat look to their family for support with fostering. They also have close friends, who are very dear to them while they foster.

Tina and Pat have found fostering to be very rewarding. They have

found "it has been a great experience to be able to give back. We always say, we do not have many talents, but to help children and families reunite is very rewarding." The most rewarding moments of fostering for Tina and Pat are "seeing the difference that you make in the life of a child, and then some of the families. We love it when the children that have been reunited with their families call or stop in-or even send an email to say hi. It is the best feeling to know you have made a difference".

Tina and Pat's advice for other for future and current foster parents is to "always keep your ears and eyes open to the children you care for; they need your support during their transitional period. Remember to use the paper of questions given to you so that you know as much about the child that you will be placed with. Do not take a child if you do not think you will be able to handle the things they come with. You have to remember that each time a child is placed or moved, it is so hard for them to adjust and trust the next family that will be taking care of them. Trust is a big thing for these kids, and they need to trust".

Foster Parents Needed

Foster Parents are our best recruiters and we need your help. We need more foster parents willing to take school age children. Get a friend to join us and we will reward you with a gift card. Gift cards will be awarded once the licensing process is completed. Call Shari Rather for more details at 262-548-7267.

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
Nikki Mertens
262-246-6180

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care
Coordinator
262-548-7267

October 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
42 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
15 Children

Group Homes:
3 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
3 Children

Relative Placements:
56 Children

**Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties:**
25 Homes

Social Workers:

Bob Alioto
262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold
262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser
262-548-7261

Angie Briggs
262-548-7275

Jennifer Eiler
262-548-7260

Jeannine Eng
262-548-7268

Margaret Johnson
262-548-7265

Elizabeth Russo
262-548-7349

Kim Sampson
262-548-7273

Linda Senger
262-548-7698

Ted Wuerslin
262-548-7269

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.

