

# Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County  
Health & Human Services  
February 2010



## What You Can Do to Strengthen Sibling Connections

A great deal depends on our ability to maintain and strengthen sibling connections for children in the child welfare system.

### Placing Siblings Together Makes a Difference

Usually, the best way to maintain sibling connections in foster care is to place brothers and sisters with the same family. Research indicates that when they are placed together with at least one of their siblings, children experience an enhanced sense of safety (Shlonsky, et al., 2005) and fewer emotional and behavioral problems (Smith, 1998). They may also experience better outcomes. For instance, studies have linked joint placement of siblings to increased placement stability (Hegar, 2005) and to positive permanent outcomes—specifically, greater likelihood of reunification (Webster et al., 2005), adoption, and guardianship (Leathers, 2005).

### Separating Siblings Can Have Consequences

For most children, being separated from their siblings means losing one of the most significant relationships they have known. This can have a variety of negative consequences:

- Brothers and sisters separated from each other in foster care can experience trauma, anger, and an extreme sense of loss. Separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin the healing process, form attachments, and develop a healthy self-image (McNamara, 1990).
- Studies have shown that even babies experience depression when separated from their brothers and sisters. In one study, a 19-month-old girl was better able to cope with separation from her parents than from her siblings. When the children in this family were placed in different foster homes the baby stopped talking, refused to eat, withdrew, and rejected affection. This persisted even after she was reunited with her parents. It was not until her brothers and sisters rejoined the family that the child resumed her former behavior (Meyendorf, cited in Hegar, 1988).
- Sometimes it is only through their siblings that children have been able to gain any positive esteem. When they see good qualities in a brother or sister, they are less likely to see themselves as “a bad kid from a bad family.” Siblings are often able to reveal to each other parts of themselves that they are reluctant to share with anyone else, thus strengthening the bond between them (NRCFCPP, 2004).
- Children separated from their siblings in care may be at greater risk of placement disruption and less likely to exit to adoption or subsidized guardianship (Leathers, 2005).



### Keeping Siblings Together

The primary responsibility for keeping siblings together when they enter out-of-home care lies with child welfare professionals and the courts. However, kinship, foster, and adoptive parents (i.e., resource families) can make a big difference by doing the following:

- **Express an interest in sibling groups.** Sometimes siblings are separated for no other reason than that the agency involved cannot find a single family to care for them all (Shlonsky, et al., 2005). Resource families can help by clearly communicating to their agencies their interest in caring for sibling groups.

- **Be open to changes.** Children are more likely to be separated from their siblings if the children enter care at different times (Wulczyn & Zimmerman, 2005; Washington, 2007). Make it clear to your agency that you would consider opening your home to the siblings of children already in your care, should the need arise.

### Maintaining Connections

Even when siblings are not in the same placement, resource families can maintain and strengthen sibling connections using the following strategies, most of which come from the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning's *Sibling Practice Curriculum* (2004):

- Family-to-family visits and joint meals
- Playgroup meetings during foster parent support group or training.
- Have the children join the same sports association (e.g., play soccer together).
- Allow children to use the phone, email, Skype, or Instant Messenger to chat briefly on a daily basis.
- If your child's sibling is being cared for by another resource family in the same community, explore the possibility of babysitting for one another or using the same babysitter, child care, or respite provider. It is the social aspect of spending time together in an unstructured way that is valuable to building and maintaining sibling relationships.
- If you are an adoptive parent, consider allowing ongoing contact with your child's siblings even after the adoption is finalized.
- Children in foster care may live in homes with other children (foster, adopted, or birth) to whom they are not related, but with whom they develop ties. Ask the children in your home who is important to them and, in collaboration with the child's custodial agency, help the child maintain connections with these children as well.
- Look for opportunities to bring separated siblings together in settings such as reunion camps specifically geared to helping children connect with their brothers and sisters.



Copyright © 2009 Jordan Institute for Families

### Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 6-9 PM  
Tuesday, February 9, 2010 6-9 PM

Tuesday, March 2, 2010 6-9 PM  
Tuesday, March 9, 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

## Training

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

**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**

As I mentioned in a previous Jesse's Corner article we are implementing the Level of Care requirement for children placed in out of home care. There are five levels of out of home care, but we are starting with Level I (court ordered kinship care) and Level II (regular foster care). We are reviewing all our court ordered kinship care home and will be determining which ones will be converted to a Level I foster home. In addition, we will need to complete a thorough assessment of each child in placement and match appropriate services to the child and foster home. The purpose is to ensure that the child's needs are met while in out of home care as well as giving the caregiver the training and support they need to meet the child's needs. This addition is as much a part of this mandate as the licensing. The State is looking at an assessment tool to meet this requirement and we anticipate that this will be implemented at a later date. Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator will assume this responsibility with assistance from the Kinship Care staff. Since all of the caregivers will need to receive training, we will invite them to participate in our foster parent training. For some of you that have not completed your pre-placement training you may see some "relative caregivers" at your upcoming training. By including relative caregivers in the foster parent training we're hopeful it adds to the richness of the training and that relatives will share some of their experiences with birth parents and the challenges they've experienced. The only change for current licensed foster homes is that your foster home licensed will be a Level II foster home. If you have any specific questions please feel free to contact Shari Rather at (262) 548-7267 or Lisa Roberts, Permanency Services Unit Supervisor at (262) 548-7271.

We continue to offer foster parent training at different dates and times to accommodate all of our foster parents. Despite these efforts, we continue to have some foster families that have not found the time to meet their foster parent training requirements. With all the tragic cases, we have read in the newspaper about babies and children abused and neglected in foster care we need to ensure that every licensed foster parent has the training and support they need. As a result, we have mandated pre-placement, foundation and ongoing training for all of our foster parents. I have requested our Foster Care Coordinator, Shari Rather to contact those foster parents that need to complete their training. It is important that all of our foster parents meet their training requirements. For some foster parents this expectation may be too much and if that's the case please let Shari Rather know and she will talk to you about all the options.

We appreciate the dedication and support that all of you have given to our foster care program to ensure the safety, well-being and permanency for all of our foster children. We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming training!

Jesse



### 2010 Rates for Foster Care and Clothing

	<u>Care</u>	<u>Clothing</u>
0-4	\$349.00	\$225.00
5-11	\$381.00	\$262.50
12-14	\$433.00	\$300.00
15-18	\$452.00	\$300.00



**A very special thanks to  
Maureen Erb  
for her hard work and dedication  
to the Foster Care Forum.**

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.

### **New Ideas For Parenting Children & Adolescence with ADHD/ADD**

Tuesdays, March 2 - 30  
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Regardless of whether your child is on medication or not, as a parent you still need to deal with your child as a person. These classes will explore the five gifts of the ADHD child, and teach parental coaching skills that cultivate the child's emotional intelligence.

### **Love and Logic®**

Tuesdays, March 3 - 30  
5:30 - 7 p.m.

Love and Logic is a philosophy founded by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D., and provides simple and practical techniques to help participants have less stress and more fun while raising responsible kids. This curriculum provides immediate results with techniques like: setting limits with enforceable statements, sharing control through lots of small choices and many more.

### **The Argumentative Child**

Mondays, March 1 - 22  
6 - 7:30 p.m.

When parents get caught up in arguments with their children, they give away their power and expose that they don't know a better way to handle the situation. Put an end to parent-child arguments with these effective problem-solving techniques.

### **Controlling Conflict in the Family**

Tuesdays, April 6 - 27  
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.

### **Disciplining the Child**

Mondays, April 5 - 27  
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Many parenting experts recommend a variety of discipline techniques, focusing on punishments and rewards, but too often they just don't work. This class will give parents essential skills for effectively disciplining their child.

## Tips for Reducing Sibling Rivalry

### By Elizabeth Pantley

Treat each child as an individual. Help children understand that they are treated differently by you and have different privileges and responsibilities because they are different individuals.

- Respect each child's space, toys, and time when he wants to be alone, away from his siblings.
- Avoid labeling or comparing one child to the other.
- When a new child comes into the family, prepare the other children.
- Play detective. Watch and note when siblings are not getting along (before dinner, in the car, etc.) and plan separate quiet activities for those times.
- Watch how you treat each child to see if you are contributing to the rivalry. Don't play favorites.
- Have realistic expectations of how they should get along, cooperate, share and like each other.
- Positively reinforce them when they are getting along or when they solve their own conflicts.
- Make each child feel special and important. Try to spend one-on-one time with each child every day.
- Take time out for yourself to re-energize. Remember, sibling rivalry is a normal and expected part of family life.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting*  
Source: US Children's Bureau, 2006

## Maintaining Connections with Siblings

### By Lauren Zingraff, SaySo Program Coordinator

There is no question how important it is for foster child to be able to maintain their sibling relationships. For many children in substitute care, one of the most traumatic experiences occurs when they are separated from their brothers and sister.

The 2009-2010 SaySo Board of Directors has two biological sisters as representatives. They are only one year apart in age and their birthdays are only two days apart. The oldest sister is 16 years old and currently resides by her choice in a group home. The younger sister, Shanita, is 15 years old and was recently adopted. We thought it would be informative to see how two siblings on two different "permanency" paths maintain their connections. For these two sisters, being involved in SaySo together is one way to remain connected to each other. Their story also shows how imperative it is to listen and take into account young people's feelings about permanency.

While these two sisters may not share a home anymore, they continue to share a loving and healthy bond as siblings. Below is Shanita's very personal perspective in her own words on the importance of maintaining sibling connections.

### Torn and Ripped Apart, Sewn and Glued Together

#### By Shanita, age 15

My story starts when me, my two sisters, and my brother were taken away from our uncle's home. Our uncle's abusive home. We lived in constant fear of being beaten for anything that upset him. We never knew if there was going to be food in the fridge when we came home from school. Would he be there to open the door, or will we have to wait in the cold, again, for a few hours? In his house "Stupid A\*\*," "Idiot," and "Ugly Thing" were often our nicknames.

#### Split Up

So we were glad when we left our uncle's home, if somewhat frightened. But I never thought that I would be separated from my siblings. We were split up into two groups. My little sister and little brother were dropped off first. I didn't trust who they were staying with....As we drove away, it hit me: I would never watch Power Rangers with my brother or play dolls with my sister again.

#### What Happened Next

Me and my big sister were dropped off not too far from my other siblings. We had visits, but they were more like meetings because our uncle had to be there.

Me and my big sister argued a lot. We weren't as close as I was to my other siblings. We were polar opposites. But during the four years we lived together, I think I began to love her more.

My little sister didn't stay there. She ended up in a group home for behavior. It was always hard to contact her and when I did see her she would hug me until it hurt.

My brother came to live with me and my big sister because our uncle had beaten him in a drunken rage. I wanted to kill my uncle when I saw my brother's face. He stayed with us for a while. Yes, we argued, but that's what

siblings do.

#### Adoption: I Say Yes, My Sister Says No

By this time my foster parents had brought up the idea of adoption. I said yes to adoption, my sister said no. She was still waiting for our mom to get straight and come get us like she promised, but it didn't seem [to me] like she was coming along.

We all have different views on adoption....I did what I thought was best for me.

#### Our Relationships Now

Our brother left after about a year. I call him every blue moon to see how he is doing.

My little sister got out of the group home and into a foster home not too far away from us. Our visits are better now that our uncle is completely out of the picture. One time we had an overnight visit, my sisters and I. My big sister doesn't stay with me anymore, and now lives in a group home. She visits me almost every other weekend.

I was angry at everyone when [my big sister] left. Now I've forgiven everyone, but I will never forget the day when my heart crumpled in front of me.

The bonds between me and my siblings have been torn and ripped apart by cruel and unknowing hands, but slowly they were sewn and glued back together stronger than ever because of our experiences. Even though we are spread apart we are closer than ever....I love them all dearly.

Copyright © 2009 Jordan Institute for Families

## Non-Helpful Ways of Coping with Painful Emotions

Unstandably, people do not like pain, either physical or emotional. Children and adults alike use a variety of psychological defenses to cope with emotional pain. Although initially these defenses may be protective, through time they themselves become inhibiting and not helpful. A major thrust in therapy is identifying and overcoming the defenses which are interfering with the individual's continued growth. Professionals need to be aware of them not only in the children they are working with but also in themselves, the birth parents, foster parents, and others. The pain a child or birth parent is experiencing may tap into unresolved separation or loss experience of an adult working with the case. If the adult tries to avoid facing her own pain, she may stop being effective to children and parents she is trying to help.

During the early phases of the grief process in particular, it is common for the grieving individual to try to numb the pain. This may be done by sleeping constantly, or keeping so busy that there is no time to think. Adults and adolescents—and sometimes even younger children may turn to drugs or alcohol to diminish pain.

Denial, avoidance, and minimization are all common defenses. Both adults and children may need help facing the reality of their situation. That means helping professionals must not align with the grieving individual in avoiding the pain but must provide the emotional support necessary to face and overcome it. For example, when visits are avoided because adults do not want to see a child's pain, it is not helpful to resolution of the grieving process.

Displacement of feelings or projecting blame onto others are also common defenses used to cope with painful emotions. As every experienced foster parent knows, the child's angry feelings are frequently displaced onto members of the foster family. Birth parents may project blame onto caseworkers or sometimes onto the child himself saying something such as, "He was asking for it." It is important for all adults to remember the children are never responsible for adult actions. No matter how a child behaves or misbehaves, adults must learn to always take full responsibility for their own actions and reactions. Although support for their feelings may be provided, the adults' abusive or neglectful behaviors must be realistically confronted.

Feelings of loss of control over one's life frequently accompany the grief process. When faced with these feelings, individuals may try to regain control in every area they can. Again, caseworkers should not be surprised or angry when either children or adults try to reassert some semblance of control in their lives. The job of helping adults is to support children and their birth parents in regaining a healthy sense of autonomy and control. Time and again they may need help in examining how their own controlling behaviors are either working for or against them. Although others can help them identify their options, only they can make the final choice.

Physical complaints are common during the grief process. The human mind and body are not separate. When one is psychologically at risk, he is more likely to become physically ill. When an individual is physically ill, he is more prone to over— or under— react to psychological stress. Some individuals seem to transfer all of their psychological pain into physical distress. Actually physical symptoms may provide increased opportunities for emotional and physical nurturing to be provided by those who care about helping the grieving individual.

The information in this article was taken from the book, [A Child's Journey Through Placement](#) by Vera I. Fahlberg, M.D.

# February 2010 Foster Parent Spotlight

## Tammie & Shawn Clendenning



Tammie and Shawn live in Merton, Wisconsin. Tammie is from Pewaukee and Shawn is from Waukesha. They met when they were two years old. Tammie grew up five houses down from Shawn's grandparents in Pewaukee. They have

been together since 1986 and were high school sweethearts. They were married in 1990 and will be celebrating 20 years in July. They have three sons, Nick (17), Eric (12), and Luke (10).

Their support system is each other, their parents, their sisters, their church and their friends. They enjoy all types of activities together such as, vacationing in Florida, camping, hiking, movies and games.

Having three boys they both yearned for a little girl so they explored adoption but after realizing the intense process Tammie suggested fostering. Shawn loves kids and though it was a great way to help out kids in need.

Tammie and Shawn have had one placement. Although they did not get a girl, they have been blessed to have a boy placed with them for 8 months. He is currently 20-months old. Their first experience has been incredible. The child they have placed with them is such a wonderful little boy. He brings a smile to them each and everyday. The biggest joy has been watching their other boys with him.

Tammie and Shawn completed the pre-placement training and most of the foundation training. The training has been very beneficial. It provides information on working with the birth family, giving them a better level of understanding of the child, also with dealing with the issues that arise, including what comes next - the unknown.

Tammie and Shawn feel the most rewarding part of fostering has been knowing they can do their part to help this little boy have a normal life and also helping the birth parents through some of their hurdles. The most difficult part of fostering for Tammie and Shawn has been the frustration felt towards the birth parents for not doing what is needed to get this little boy back, plus the emotional roller coaster that they are all on.

Advice for other foster parents would be to have patience in dealing with the system and the birth parents. Look at ...each day with a foster child as a blessing and realize you are helping to raise a child with normalcy and love.



<p><b>Contact Numbers:</b></p> <p>Waukesha H &amp; HS 262-548-7212</p> <p>Children's Mental Health Outreach 262-548-7666</p> <p>Medical Emergency: 911 Family Emergency: 211</p> <p><b>Foster Parent Mentor</b> Nikki Mertens 262-246-6180</p> <p>Lisa Roberts, Supervisor 262-548-7271</p> <p>Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator 262-548-7267</p> <p>FASPP (Support for Allegations of Abuse and Neglect) Norma Schoenberg 920-922-9627</p>	<p><b>December 2009 Placements</b></p> <p>Regular Foster Care: 46 Children</p> <p>Treatment Foster Care: 15 Children</p> <p>Group Homes: 4 Children</p> <p>Residential Care Facilities: 2 Children</p> <p>Relative Placements: 56 Children</p> <p>Total Homes Assisting Other Counties 24 Homes</p>	<p><b>Social Workers:</b></p> <p>Bob Alioto 262-548-7262</p> <p>Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348</p> <p>Angie Briggs 262-548-7275</p> <p>Margaret Johnson 262-548-7265</p> <p>Cindie Remshek 262-548-7639</p> <p>Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349</p> <p>Kim Sampson 262-548-7273</p> <p>Linda Senger 262-548-7698</p> <p>Deanna Stevlingson 262-896-8570</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We Need You!</b></p> <p>For more information about becoming a foster parent in Waukesha County, please contact Shari Rather at:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="mailto:srather@waukeshacounty.gov">srather@waukeshacounty.gov</a></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>262-548-7267</b></p> <p>Or visit our website at <a href="http://www.waukeshacounty.gov">www.waukeshacounty.gov</a> And follow the links to foster care.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Jack Safro</b> Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury Lexus•Infiniti•Scion</p>			