

November 2008 Foster Parent Spotlight

Tara & Eric Peschel



Eric was born and raised in Milwaukee and Tara was born in Germany but raised in Milwaukee. They met each other through Eric's older brother who was one of Tara's friends. Eric and Tara started dating in 1999 and then married in 2001. Eric works at Shorewest doing graphic design and Tara is currently a stay at home mom. The Peschel's have four children, 2 biological and 2 they just adopted.

As a family, they enjoy family game night, movie nights, Brewer games, little league and band concerts.

Being a foster parent has been a life long dream for Tara. Her mom was a social worker for some time when she was growing up and to Tara "it just seemed like it was inevitable." On the other hand Eric says, "My wife made me do it." Being foster parents has been the hardest thing both of them have ever done but has also been the most rewarding. "Any bump in the road, we hit it. If anything could go wrong, it did. It comes down to this-we had a child that everyone besides the system gave up on. We couldn't give up on her and her brother. We do this for the children. We have to be there for them. Someone has to fight for the voices that can't be heard and we are honored to be that someone."

When becoming foster parents Tara and Eric had to learn to do things "on the fly," after accepting a placement from Milwaukee they did not know what was to come in the future. They found this to be challenging but with the help and support from family and their church they are able to stay positive. They found going to different trainings was helpful. They have attended a training on Reactive Attachment Disorder which they found extremely helpful along with PACE training which also helped them with foster parenting.

Not everything the Peschel's faced was always easy. They found some things to be more difficult than others. The most difficult of those things

was the system, not because it is bad, but because it is frustrating. They always felt that they were left in the dark not knowing what was going on much of the time and things didn't always go the way they thought it should. By having the foster children in their home and being able to go through the trials they feel it has truly made them better parents and taught them many life lessons.

To all those foster parents out there, "Don't give up, No matter how hard it gets, no matter what you go through, don't give up. These children need someone on their side and you are that someone. The other advice I would like to give is that your social worker should be your best friend. Treat them like they are your best friend. He or she will be your biggest supporter whether something goes right or wrong. They really want what's best for the child and so do you."

Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

November 6, 2008	6-9 PM
November 20, 2008	6-9 PM
December 4, 2008	6-9 PM
December 18, 2008	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.

Contact Numbers:

Waukesha H & HS 262-548-7212
Children's Mental Health Outreach 262-548-7666
Medical Emergency: 911 Family Emergency: 211
Foster Parent Mentors Nikki Mertens (12 and under) 262-246-6180
Bette Winkler (over 12) 262-679-9634
Lisa Roberts, Supervisor 262-548-7271
Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator 262-548-7267
Michelle Cornwell, Visitation Coordinator 262-548-7370

September 2008 Placements

Regular Foster Care: 45 Children Admitted Discharged
Treatment Foster Care: 22 Children 2 Admitted 2 Discharged
Group Homes: 7 Children 0 Admitted 0 Discharged
Residential Care Facilities: 5 Children 0 Admitted 1 Discharged
Relative Placements: 29 Children Admitted Discharged

Social Workers:

Suzanne Arnold	262-548-7348
Peggy Beisser	262-548-7261
Kathe Blum	262-548-7275
Jeannine Eng	262-548-7268
Steve Handrich	262-548-7262
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
Jennifer Wygle	262-548-7260

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.

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
November 2008



Establishing Household Rules

The social worker has just called and asked for placement today! The child will soon be here! Your mind is filled with a whirlwind of questions! What will the child be like? What has she gone through? What will she expect? What rules is she used to?

Not only do you have plenty of questions but, upon entering care, children also have many questions about your family and how it works. By talking over house rules, your foster children will know what you expect from them, and also what they may expect from you. Families in foster care and adoption can succeed if they know what to expect!

The Initial Meeting

When first meeting with the case worker, child, child's parent(s) and previous caretaker, discuss the special needs, strengths, and culture of the child. Talk with the team about the success of previous limits and rules. Were these useful in allowing the youth and others to be safe and did the child learn from these guidelines? Are there suggestions from the team for creating specific rules, based on previous successes or court-ordered rules?

Basic Rule Setting

As a means of preparation for meeting with the child and the team, create *basic* house rules that can be applied to most of the family. Put the rules in writing with clear and brief language that can be understood and enforced, such as, "Always knock on others' doors before entering." Simple, positive words are most effective.

Depending on the age, developmental level, and culture of the foster children, the rules will need to fit their level of understanding as well as their culture. In many religions (Muslim, Jewish, and Christianity, for example), fasting and particular foods are not to be eaten during certain seasons or celebrations. In some cultures, showering or socializing for females while they have their period is not allowed. And most black children, for example, have different hair and skin care needs than most white children.

Topics to consider when writing home rules include:

- Hygiene
- Meals and snacks
- Clothing
- Bedtime
- Use of telephone and computer
- General housekeeping and chores
- Communication

Other topics to consider, depending upon the age and issues of children that you foster include:

- Curfew/supervision
- Consequences (of smoking, using drugs, or alcohol; running away, law violations, etc.)
- Appropriate clothing
- Dating and social activities
- Medications (Also remember that the Wisconsin foster care code says that all medicine must be out of reach or locked up.)

Sample House Rules

The following are possible topic areas to consider when developing house rules for your family and foster or adoptive placement. When creating the guidelines, consider the questions that the foster child may have about how you and your family operate. Consider rules that will

meet the needs of your family, fit your parenting style and the needs of the foster or adoptive child. (Examples of rules from the fictional foster parents "Johnnie and Chris" are in italics.)

Hygiene

How many showers or baths and hair washing per week are kids expected to take? What time limit, if any, is placed on the shower or bathroom time?
"Showers or baths and hair washing will be taken at least every other day. Each family member may spend 15 minutes in the bathroom."

Meals and Snacks

Where and when can people eat? Can they get snacks by asking? Can they get in the cupboards on their own?
"All family members will eat breakfast and supper together at the kitchen table. Snacks can be eaten in the TV room by asking before snacking."

Clothing

Who does the laundry? What do family members do with dirty clothes?
"Each person will fold his or her own laundry and place clean clothes in the dresser; dirty clothes in the bathroom hamper one time per week. Johnnie will wash and dry all the laundry."

Bedtime

Where are the children allowed to sleep? When do they go to bed? How do they wake up in the morning?
"Bedtime is 8 pm on school nights and 9 pm on weekends. Each person will sleep in pajamas and sleep in his or her own bed, unless there's a special occasion (camping, sleepover where friends sleep in the living room, etc.)"

Telephone

Who can use the phone? How often can the phone be used to talk to family or friends? Is there anyone who can't call (especially because of a court order, team meeting, etc.)?
"The phone can be used to make calls, with permission, for 10 minutes each night before 8 pm. Two phone calls per night can be received from others before 8 pm and can last for up to 10 minutes."

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Strengthening Families Training for Foster Parents

November 8, 2008
9:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Center for Learning Excellence
N4W22000 Bluemound Road, Waukesha
To register call Shari Rather 262-548-7267

Childcare available—Contact Shari Rather

Families that are strong and healthy share similar characteristics. Families in the child welfare system often need help to develop or build on these strengths. This training will focus on 6 of these Protective Factors and how you as a foster parent can help the families of the children you foster be better able to protect and care for their children when they return home.

This is an interactive workshop helping foster parents find creative ways to encourage positive outcomes for foster children and their families.



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

I recently attended the Wisconsin Summit on Children and Families sponsored by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, Children's Court Improvement Program and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. There were several presentations regarding foster care issues that I want to share with you. The presentation on Concurrent Planning was very helpful and informative. The facilitator suggested we have the parents sign a Full Disclosure Statement about "Concurrent Permanency Planning". This form is for parents of children in foster care and explains our responsibility to develop concurrent plans for children. I think this form would be helpful in our ongoing effort to implement concurrent planning in Waukesha County. I have asked Lisa Roberts, Permanency Unit supervisor to discuss this information with her staff. You may want to discuss this with your assigned social worker in the near future. In addition to concurrent planning, there was information about recording and maintaining information about the foster child's birth family and experience in foster care. Shari Rather informed me that she discusses this during training and hands out the booklet: ALL ABOUT ME (My life in words and pictures) for foster parent to keep records and pictures for their foster child. It is my understanding that some of you are using this booklet but we are not sure if everyone is doing so. I will be asking Shari and/or your assigned worker to follow up with you about this. I think it is very important for children to have information about their birth family and experience in foster care. I know some of you are keeping scrapbooks and that is very helpful.

Waukesha County was well represented at this conference as the honorable Judge Patrick Haughney, Commissioner Linda Georgeson, Assistance Corporation Counsel Molly Jasmer and Robert Mueller, Kelly Haag, Clerk of Juvenile Court attended along with Attorney Linda Coyle and Attorney Michael Kaiser (GAL's) and several staff from our Department including our Director, Peter Schuler and Deputy Director, Don Maurer. We are planning to have a follow up meeting to discuss opportunities to improve child welfare and juvenile court collaboration in Waukesha County. I will keep you posted to any new initiatives.

I would like to wish all of our foster parents a very Happy Thanksgiving!

Jesse



Celebrating Holidays with Children You Foster From The Foster Care and Adoption Center

Conflicting loyalties and lost dreams often make the holidays a difficult time for children in foster care. Just as studies show that holidays are stressful times for most of us, these reactions are compounded for youth placed in your home. Here are some suggestions for the holidays.

How can my family make it easier for the children in foster care while they are in our home?

- Talk about the season ahead of time. Talk about how your family celebrates the holidays. Tell children which of the traditional holidays your house recognizes. Is it Thanksgiving? St. Nick's Day? Kwanzaa? Hanukah? Christmas? New Year? Or all of the above. Talking about the holidays gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities and ask questions.
- Help children in foster care imagine what to expect in your home. Much of what we assume to be commonplace can be new to the children you foster.
- Share the religious meaning the holidays may have for your family. Talk about your family's specific customs and activities.
- Use this time of sharing to learn especially about the religious beliefs, customs, and activities of the children you foster.
- Try to incorporate at least some of their traditions into your traditions.
- Some parents try to keep the holiday low key in order to help minimize some of the stress.

How can we work with birth families during the holidays?

- Again, ask children about their experiences and try to incorporate some of their traditions. The children placed in your home may miss some activities that they experienced with their family or in a previous placement.
- If possible, ask your child's family members about their holiday traditions and customs. Ask about their beliefs and observances. Although you may feel stretched at the holidays, try to coordinate schedules with the birth families. This gives the children a chance to share what is familiar while experiencing new traditions.
- This is a good time for the youth in your home to make small gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends.
- This is a time when many children feel conflicted feelings about their birth families and worry about them. It is a good time to let the young person know that it is okay for them to be safe and cared for even if their family struggles. Reassure them if you can, about the safety and care of their birth families.

What are some of the ways I can help the children who I foster get through the holidays? What are some signs of grief or sadness that I can look for?

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Talk about your child's feelings throughout the season.
- Give your children time and space to grieve. Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:
 - Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally
 - Soiling themselves or bedwetting
 - Becoming withdrawn and isolated
 - Having temper tantrums
 - Being rebellious
 - Complaining more than usual
- Try to remember the developmental age of the children you foster. It will also help you to stay patient if you keep in mind the challenges of the season for your child before you react.

What are some things we can do to make family get-togethers easier?

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If you cannot get together before the big event, introduce your children to family and friends who will be at the celebration by going through pictures.
- Prepare them for the "characters" in your family and also tell them about other children who might be there.
- Tell them if your celebrations are quiet or loud, sacred or silly, big or small.
- Describe the home or place where the event will be held, and tell how it usually proceeds.
- Be realistic about it-do not make your celebrations seem perfect, but do not stress the challenges that are part of all family events.
- Give your children a camera so that they can record the celebration, and also give them one for holiday visits with their birth families.

What can I do to help my children learn what is expected of them at family celebrations?

- This is an opportunity to teach the behaviors and manners that you would like the youth you foster to learn. Go over basic manners such as "please" and "thank you."
- Explain the expectations of children prior to family get-togethers, and practice those behaviors ahead of time.
- Use role playing at home so that they can practice.
- Make sure you and your family/friends are on the same page regarding gifts from and to your children. Perhaps try to have your child bring a small hostess gift to the get together: baked goods, nuts, candles, ornament, etc.
- Tell family and friends about your children, and try to introduce them before the holidays. It's a good time to remind others about the confidentiality you honor concerning the children you foster, and it might be a good time to practice some polite but firm answers to some questions.
- Remember especially to ask your children what they would like to have shared about themselves.

Establishing Household Rules—Continued

Chores

What work or household chores are expected of family members? Is there an allowance? (Remember, the Wisconsin foster care code says that each child be given weekly spending money." Can extra money be earned? *"Each person will sign up for a chore to be done each day for one week. Children will earn money for a completed chore. If a chore is not finished, there will be no payment for that day."*

Communication

If children are feeling frustrated or mad how does your family work out disagreements or fights? Where should kids go and what should they do when they are mad or angry? *"If you are feeling frustrated, angry or upset, tell one of us that you need some time to talk to them alone. Try to be patient and maintain your cool if they are not available right away."*

Computer Use

Can children use the computer? What sites are acceptable? Do kids need permission before using the computer? Do kids need permission before using the computer? For what purpose can it be used? *"You may use the computer for one hour a day, but first you must get permission."*

Involving the Child and Family Members

Children, especially teens, can learn from talking with you about the house rules and what and why you expect certain behavior from them. Consider having family meetings where family members can discuss their needs, wants, and problems with certain rules. Don't forget to also talk about what's working well.

Be open to updating or removing house rules. If it appear that your children have been complying with a particular house rule and no longer need it, by all means let them know how well they've done and change the rule to give them more freedom. By creating reasonable house rules that your children can achieve, you will be promoting self esteem, self control and overall success.

From the Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center of Wisconsin

Internet Safety Tips for Caregivers From the Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

The Internet offers many opportunities for adults and children to learn, and the Internet has also dramatically changed how we communicate.

Unfortunately, the Internet is also a place where children and adults can be seriously victimized by various kinds of predators. Children and adults can be exposed to: cyber-bullying, inappropriate content, and loss of privacy.

In order to effectively protect our children, parents need to know the dangerous aspects of the Internet, including taking the necessary steps to promote Internet safety for your family.

The Crimes Against Children Research Center found that one in five youth using the Internet received online sexual solicitations. We need to encourage our children to come to us when something inappropriate happens.

Following are some tips that may be helpful for you and your children.

Establishing Family Ground Rules

Families have house rules for a multitude of behaviors and expectations, but sometimes families neglect to address the importance of developing clear and consistent rules regarding computer usage.

Families can post a written *Family Internet Agreement* that should:

- Set clear boundaries on prohibiting the posting or sharing of personal identifying information online; such as names, pictures, telephone numbers, addresses, passwords, or credit card numbers.

This includes not letting your child's last name appear on the "from" line and some foster parents don't allow their child to have even his or her first name as part of the email address. Absolutely do not let your child have an email address such as: Jane.Doe2011@email.com

- Designate the amount of time that each child can be online.
- Specify time frames when each child can be online.
- Give a general outline of which sites are appropriate (i.e. Disney, Ask Jeeves, Wikipedia, etc.) and which sites are forbidden (i.e. all sites that require the viewer to be 18 or older).

- Establish specific Internet ground rules of what is acceptable and appropriate behavior.
- Specify who the child should tell if he or she receives any threatening material.
- Prohibit opening of e-mails or attachments from an unknown person.
- Depending on the team members' input, consider making one of the rules be that the foster parent (and others as necessary) be allowed to know the password of the account and monitor mail periodically. Stress that the child has a right to absolute privacy with "snail mail," but that the Internet is a riskier place.
- Share this Internet agreement with other members of the child's team (birth family, social worker, school staff, respite providers, etc.)

Educate:

- Become familiar with the Internet. This is important whether or not you have a computer in your house because computers are easily accessible to your children.
- If need be, enroll in a computer class or consult with your friends, neighbors or colleagues.
- Set up time to talk with your children and have them teach you what they already know. You're likely to learn something new, and it helps build your child's self esteem to teach you something.

Communicate:

Talk openly about the dangers that exist on the Internet and encourage to be responsible.

Supervise:

By placing your computer in a central and visible location, such as a living room instead of a bedroom, you will be able to closely and consistently monitor Internet use. Make sure that the monitor is facing in such a way that people who are passing by can view it easily. This has an added benefit of the kids knowing that you're going to safe sites when you're at the computer, as well.

Explore Together:

Learn from one another by utilizing the Internet as a teaching tool and educational resource. While the Internet can be dangerous, it is also an invaluable resource of opportunities to learn and grow together.

Resources

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has developed a parent's guide to Internet safety: <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm>

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's website is the Nation's Resource Center for child protection: <http://www.missingkids.com/>

The Children's Partnership website has many resources including a PowerPoint presentation that you can download for free as well as a free downloadable resource booklet entitled: The Parents' Guide to the Information Superhighway: Rules and Tools for Families Online: <http://www.childrenpartnership.org>

NetSmartz provides resources for parents and guardians, educators, law enforcement, teens and kids and in addition, there is a Spanish online resource: <http://www.netsmartz.org>

i-SAFE.org incorporates classroom curriculum with dynamic community outreach to empower students, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and concerned adults to make the Internet a safer place: <http://www.i-SAFE.org>

SafeKids.com provides tips and resources for families, youth and adults about safely navigating and exploring the Internet and in addition, they include an Online Safety Quiz: <http://www.safekids.com>

Be Safe Online provides advice and information about Internet safety for parents and teachers, plus opportunities to discuss problems and share solutions: <http://www.besafeonline.org>

GetNetWise is a public service created by Internet industry corporations and public interest groups with the goal of having "Internet users are only "one click away" from the resources they need to make informed decision about their and their family's use of the Internet." <http://www.getnetwise.org>