



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
July 2009



Effective Management of Crisis Behavior From Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Foster and adopt kids are often an especially vulnerable group of people. Their life experiences are different from those people who have known love, understanding, and consistency. Kids in care have unmet needs and have often experienced multiple losses and stress.

Behavior is an expression of a feeling or an attempt to meet a need. *Crisis* is a time of social, emotional and physical distress that temporarily impairs a child's ability to cope.

Our response to the crisis should be to help develop the youth's self-control, self-worth, independence, and responsibility for his or her behavior. The following are guidelines for what to do before, during and after a crisis.

The three stages of crisis include:

1. **The events in a child or adolescent's life are causing stress or agitation, but there is no current crisis.** As the caregiver, you should assess what the child is feeling and try to recognize signals (pacing, speaking loudly, withdrawing, sweating, fidgeting, reverting to past behaviors, etc.)

Example: Your foster daughter is stressed because she has just learned that her parent was arrested for possession of drugs last night, and her siblings are now living with a relative. She is yelling at you and insisting that she must go immediately to see her parent in jail. You explain that she cannot see her mom because of jail visitation rules. The child is screaming, making threats to runaway, pacing, and is near the outside door.

Be an active listener: *"I hear that you are really angry and frustrated."* Speak calmly, assertively and respectfully. *"I understand that you feel this is very unfair."*

2. **Behavioral changes increase in the child.** This includes:
 - Being anxious, upset or fearful
 - Making demands or threats
 - Crying
 - Yelling
 - Wanting to isolate
 - Running away
 - Being physically aggressive

You may want to suggest that your child consider other options. *"As soon as you sit down, we can discuss what is wrong. Let's figure out the best way to handle this."*

You should remove others and dangerous items from the area and keep your distance physically.

You can respond by giving your child time and space. *"Let's not argue, Charleen. You know that we have to follow court rules. I cannot change them. I'll give you some*

time to think about this. I know that you will make a good decision."

3. **After the outburst,** your child is probably calm but may appear tired or depressed. Give the child time to process. Later ask, *"Can we talk about what upset you?"*

Help your child recognize his feelings and behavior. If you can, try to connect them for your child. *"What were you feeling when you were yelling? How did you react when you were angry?"*

Develop a plan for new behaviors for the "next time" and practice it with your child. *"What else could you do when you are feeling angry?"*

Try to get back to your routine and reassure him. *"I know that next time, when you get frustrated, you will talk to John or me."*

Hopefully your child will be relieved. In the future, try to notice your child using the new behaviors and compliment on its use.

In summary, learn *with* your child and the team (case manager, biological family, social worker, foster parent, respite family, therapist, psychologist, teacher) as to what triggers the child's behavioral outbursts.

Examples of triggers include:

- Telling your child what to do
- Being left alone
- Someone calling him or her names
- Yelling or being exposed to loud voices or noises
- Being touched

Develop a plan with your child and the support team for various ways for the child to deal with triggers.

Examples of way to deal with triggers include:

- Giving your child choices
- Providing physical activity
- Responding in a calm voice
- Giving you and your child time to cool off

Help your children to recognize activities which will help them to calm themselves, such as:

- Writing
- Exercising
- Spending quiet time in their rooms
- Wrapping up in a blanket
- Reading
- Talking to others



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

As some of you may know, we use the State Automated Child Welfare Information System called eWiSACWIS to document child protective services. This includes, but is not limited to, documenting child abuse/neglect referrals and investigations, case plans/reviews, court reports and permanency plans, foster care licensing, recertifications and ongoing training for foster parents and social workers. We are also using eWiSACWIS for our Child Welfare Preparedness Planning (to find foster children and foster parents/relative caregivers). We continue to explore opportunities to expand the use of technology to assist staff such as scanning court documents and the preparedness plans into eWiSACWIS.

We recently purchased telephone headsets and some Dragon Speak software for staff to dictate their case notes, case plans, court reports and other documents. I am mentioning these items to let you know what else we are considering. I am not a "technology guy" but we're considering using TWITTER for foster care related activities. As an example, when we are looking for a foster home Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator and Lisa Roberts, Permanency Services Supervisor, review each foster home and identify which foster home is willing and able to take the child or children. Afterwards, they make phone calls and most often, leave messages for foster parents. As you can imagine, this is a time consuming process. With your permission, we will create a list of all foster parents willing to accept a message through TWITTER at their office, home, cell phone or any where they can be contacted. Once this list is created, every time we need a foster home we will send a "tweet" though TWITTER. The "tweet" will provide general information about the child or children (example: need a foster home for a healthy newborn, parent lives in City of Waukesha). Due to confidentiality, we cannot disclose identifying information so we will be very careful and share minimal information, just enough for you to determine if you can take the placement. We hope you will respond to the "tweet" and contact us. This should reduce our workload and enable us to identify a foster home sooner. Lisa and Linda Huenink our HIPAA Coordinator are creating TWITTER guidelines and procedures. As soon as that is completed, I would imagine we would test TWITTER and see how it works. Please feel free to talk to Shari or Lisa if you have any specific questions, suggestions or concerns.

I spoke to Shari Rather recently about Foundation Training for Foster Parents. It appears the attendance has not been as good as we would like. I would like to remind everyone that this training is mandated so if you have any suggestions how we could improve your attendance such as the time, location, type of training, etc. please let Shari know. **Foster Parents will not be able to continue their foster care license if they do not complete the mandatory foundation training and 10 hours of on-going training each subsequent year. To be the best foster parent you can you need training.**

We recognize that all of you have busy schedules and would like to work around your schedules as much as possible so any suggestions would be appreciated.

Jack Safto Toyota has sponsored our annual foster parent event this year and we want to express our gratitude to them. The event was attended by over 150 people and was a great day of fun activities including face painting, swimming, sack races, arts and crafts, water balloons and conversation. It was great to see Foster Parents making connections with other foster parents. The foster parents and families who attended had a wonderful time despite the blazing heat. The Machine Shed provided an awesome meal. Thank you to everyone who had a hand in making this event special. A special thank you to our social worker intern Michelle Jones for coordinating the event! Great job Michelle and thank you Jack Safto Toyota!

Jesse

The Cop With a Different Beat By Susan Schwab, Resource Specialist

Taxi driver, teacher, nurse, counselor, mentor, protector, caregiver, cop and coach. Are these descriptors of someone's career interests or a list of job openings from a recent ad?

Most certainly not. They actually define the role of Jeff, a modest but proud foster and adoptive dad from rural Wisconsin, who is also a cop.

What started as a way for Jeff and his family to "help the county have more foster homes" has resulted in the protection and nurturing of eight children who have been placed with them over the past 10 years. Even though most of the kids placed have now returned to the care of their families, they have left a lasting impression on Jeff, his wife Esther and their four children.

Jeff's wife and kids had been talking about doing foster care for years. As Esther says, "Jeff was not on the fence about doing this work; he was not even on the farm!" After much discussion and deliberation, Jeff came on board to join in the family's interest. They considered fostering as their responsibility.

As a law enforcement officer, Jeff often mentioned the struggles that county social service agencies had in finding enough families to do this important work. Esther also understood the need since she works as a social worker in the field of adoption and foster care.

When Jeff's family "signed up" to do foster care, Jeff did not anticipate being involved in the day-to-day care, joys and challenges of foster parenting. His career as a law enforcement officer kept him away from home often. The family planned for Esther to be the main caretaker of their foster placement. That plan soon vanished!

The Trials and Joys

In 2003, at the age of 6, county social workers placed Christian in foster care with Jeff and Esther. He had a great smile and a great personality. His behavior was challenging. Jeff recalls that Christian lived with them for one year and then he became available for adoption. Still having an interest only in providing foster care, social workers told Jeff and Esther that they were looking for adoptive families for Christian to meet.

It was Jeff who suggested that their family consider adopting Christian, based on their connection and love for him. Jeff knew of the great strides Christian had made while a part of their family. Jeff was worried that this special child may have a hard time connecting to a new family. He wanted Christian to succeed.

Jeff said that, "somebody needs to step up to the plate" meaning, "We need to adopt Christian." In 2004, Christian was adopted by this northern Wisconsin while Christians' classmates and school served as witnesses. It was a grand celebration!

Foster Dad Takes A Front Seat

Despite his heavy schedule, Jeff has now assumed the role of adoptive dad and is the main caretaker of Christian as well as the other kids that they foster. Esther's work commitments have caused her to be out of town and unable to assume the main caretaking role as she had in the past. As a result, Jeff and Christian have a really close bond with each other. "We're tight," says Jeff.

More often than not, Jeff is taking his son and others to doctor appointments, school meetings and soccer practice. Some days he also faces challenging behaviors from other kids in their care.

He and Esther try to keep their son and the other children very active physically. Keeping the their kids active helps distract them from other behaviors and helps them learn healthy ways of spending their time. It also gives them a chance to connect with other kids and adults who could be a positive influence!

What It Takes

Jeff has thoughts for folks who are considering foster care. He suggests that as a parent, one needs to be patient, honest and consistent. Both he and Esther also recognize that even experienced parents need support from others to parent. They recommend consulting with the child's social worker often and keeping in close communication. Jeff emphasizes taking care of yourself. He takes a break from parenting by meeting weekly with his friends to play basketball or golf, depending on the season.

He sees that the physical activity and connecting with positive, healthy friends is a way for him to decompress. Esther is involved in doing crafts and involvement in mission trips as her release. Jeff says you still need "some of your own time."

He has counted on Esther and the agency social workers for tips on parenting kids who often have been abused or neglected. Talking with your partner about day-to-day issues, making a plan and figuring out each partner's talents and limitations are topics to discuss for those who want to foster or adopt. (Also check out, *Is Fostering A Good Fit For Us?* at <http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/679/ftcprep.pdf>.)

Learning from their fostering experience, Jeff has gained a better insight and appreciation for the parents with kids in foster care, especially without additional support from family or friends. Developing a good working relationship

Continued on Page 4

Foster Family Appreciation Picnic 2009



**June 24, 2009 at Fox Brook County Park
This Event was Sponsored by Jack Safro Toyota.**

The Cop With a Different Beat—Continued from Pg. 4

between foster parents and the family of kids placed can really help the youth in foster care — the children appreciate that their family and the foster family get along.

Esther also comments on the importance that foster and adoptive dads play in the lives of foster kids and those adopted. Many youth placed in care have not had healthy or positive relationships with me or father figures in their lives. She says that foster and adoptive dads can be great role models for kids in care. She has seen the difference that dads make, both with her son Christian and with other kids she has known through her adoption work.

Men Can Foster

Jeff thinks that with the right information and the support from family, friends and social service agencies, women and men have the talents and understanding about kids to do a great job to foster or adopt a child. Is Jeff glad to have changed his mind about doing foster care? His short but emphatic answer is "Yes!"

"It's nice to give a kid an opportunity and a chance. If you can turn one life around, it is worth it," he says.

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

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| July 9, 2009 | 6-9 PM |
| July 16, 2009 | 6-9 PM |
| August 6, 2009 | 6-9 PM |
| August 20, 2009 | 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.

Waukesha Co. Department of Health & Human Services Foster Parent Summer Foundation Training

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| July 14, 2009 | Dynamics of Abuse and Neglect Part 2 |
| July 21, 2009 | Impact of Trauma on Child Development |
| July 28, 2009 | Attachment |
| August 4, 2009 | Separation & Placement |
| August 11, 2009 | Guidance & Positive Discipline |
| August 18, 2009 | Effects of Fostering on the Family |

All trainings are held in the Brookfield Room at Waukesha County Human Services Center located at 500 Riverview Avenue. Enter the Department at Door 6 and go to room G137. This is required training for all foster parents who took Pre-Placement training. This training is required within the first two years of licensure. To reserve your spot please call Shari Rather at (262)548-7267. The class size is limited to 30.

Milwaukee Brewer Tickets

Tickets are available for the July 29th game against the Washington Nationals. The game starts at 7:05 p.m. If a foster parent is interested, they should call Shari Rather for their tickets. If you take tickets, be sure to attend because if seats are unused the Brewers might not be so generous in the future.



Happy 4th of July!

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
(12 and under)
262-246-6180

Patty Vorlob
(12 and under)
262-521-1397

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator
262-548-7267

May 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
40 Children
0 Admitted
6 Discharged

Treatment Foster Care:
16 Children
0 Admitted
2 Discharged

Group Homes:
4 Children
1 Admitted
0 Discharged

Residential Care Facilities:
7 Children
0 Admitted
0 Discharged

Relative Placements:
31 Children
4 Admitted
0 Discharged

Social Workers:

Jennifer Adler
262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold
262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser
262-548-7261

Angie Briggs
262-548-7275

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

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.

