



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
June 2009



Learning on the Job By Jo Ann Wentzel

A big part of parenting is following your instincts, and if you were raised in a loving, healthy home, your instincts should be pretty good. But, even with the best of instincts, much of foster parenting is learned on the job.

Individuals who decide to become foster parents have no way of knowing what adventures lie ahead. They don't begin to suspect the challenges they will face. These beautiful, loving, innocent folks are clueless when they try to imagine the different situations they will become involved in daily.

It is not their fault that they are naïve, or uninformed, or do not anticipate the many events that will soon be part of their lives. It is natural to only know well those things you have first hand knowledge of and what you have studied. Before becoming foster parents, most people are simply parents and want to help other children as well as their own kids. We really do not offer them enough training in advance as to how to parent this high-risk kids, so the majority of us learn on the job.

Learning on the job should not strike fear in your hearts or even worry you too greatly; it is a natural function. Do you remember when you first brought your own newborn baby home from the hospital? Do you recall the feelings that ran through you as you looked at that helplessly tiny infant and realized it's total dependence was upon you? It was frightening at first to take on such a great responsibility, but you did it. You learned how to recognize all the different sounds that baby made along with their meanings. You eventually mastered diapering the still untrained toddler as they tried to escape. Recognizing the signs of childhood diseases became second nature to you, you even knew the immunization schedule by heart. Later, you became an expert in everything from school science projects to football plays. You did it all because you had to; it was necessary to better parent your kids. It is the same with foster parenting.

Understand, I still believe foster parents need so many skills that much more training should be offered and required. I think there are so many subjects we must excel at and thousands of topics we must be familiar with that good training makes sense. I am also a proponent of not reinventing the wheel if someone has already worked out the best methods why not share those. But my independent and creative nature also forces me to advise parents to follow their instincts and get creative in their approaches when it is not a life or death matter.

Learning on the job is the only sensible way to learn some things. Book learning and being shown are not the same as doing it yourself. If your natural kids were all "A" students and never suffered from learning disabilities, you are probably not an expert in that field. Don't worry, you soon will be if you parent kids like this. You will soon learn to adjust your methods and expectations for kids who cannot do well in school without lots of assistance. You will bring teaching and requests down to their level without being patronizing. You may learn to use simpler words, one task commands, and talk more slowly and deliberately. With some kids you may see a need for much more patience than you ever thought you had. Others may require a lot of handholding throughout every step of a process to complete some task. You will learn what is needed.

Before I fostered, I had no experience with chemical abuse. It took some time to realize what all the signs of abuse were and what those signs indicated. I had to learn about many different drugs, how they were used, what they cost, where they could be obtained, and what the long-term effects were from abusing them. I'd like to say I learned this from training and when first started foster care, but that is untrue. By the time I received the training I had been living with chemical abusers for more than a year. I had learned by being nosy and asking questions. I picked up street names of drugs, and places where they sold these things from the kids themselves. Often, just overheard remarks were an education.

This learning on the job also took place when it came to sexual abuse. I never was so close to that problem before. Of course, I knew it existed, but it never makes an impact on you until you experience it firsthand or witness the aftermath of its victims. After hearing the revelations from kids, that sometimes occur when they start to feel comfortable with you, you soon become an expert. It is tough to imagine what these children had to live through. Their experiences were horrible and sometimes so disgusting it is hard to fathom that one person can treat another in such a way. You may have no experience, but your instincts tell you to be cautious and to be empathic. You learn to recognize the different ways this abusive past manifests itself in youth. You start to know the reasons behind the behaviors. Like the eating disorders, the choice of clothing, the awful sleeping habits, or the mistrust of everyone. You learned this by working with these kids and being observant. Yes, training may have better prepared you for the symptoms and signs of past abuse, but you learned how to react by living with these kids. You learn to take relationships slow and lower your expectations about any affectionate return from these kids. You realize you must first build up self-esteem and trust in the world before they will believe and accept you. It is a long procedure with few quick results.

Illness, disorders, and all those acronyms for disabilities and syndromes are learned when necessary, you don't usually have too much previous knowledge of those things. Learning on the job is how I learned about diabetes and many more unpleasant things like venereal diseases and what drugs those required.

So don't worry about what you don't know. Just open your mind to learning, be observant, and let your instincts take over. You know when someone hurts they need comfort. You know when someone is confused; they need patience and understanding. And you know that every child that comes through your door needs love, so give it. The rest you can learn. Don't ever stop learning. Thanks to all foster parents who took this amazing job and now are learning more than they ever dreamed possible.



*Happy Father's Day
to all of our dedicated
foster fathers.*



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

Getting Out of a Power Struggle

Most parents have experienced a power struggle at one time or another: you ask a child to do something, they refuse or are openly defiant, and you engage in a back-and-forth struggle to get the child to comply. In other words, you get sucked into it:

The first step to getting out of a power struggle is recognizing when you are in one. Most power struggles occur after a stressful event for a child, and generally happen because his feelings are keeping him from moving towards his "real" goal. He becomes focused on proving he is right (which is impossible since his behavior is driven by irrational beliefs) rather than being focused on "getting what he wants."

If they are not careful, parents likewise can become focused on "winning the argument" rather than on getting what they want. No matter how hard we focus and try to avoid power struggles, there will still be times we find ourselves being pulled into one or right in the middle of one. Here are some suggestions if you find yourself in the thick of it.

I want to thank everyone who attending on annual Foster Parent Ribbon Ceremony on May 5th. County Executive, Dan Vrakes read a proclamation honoring foster parents in Waukesha County. The proclamation will be proudly displayed in our building. In addition, our Director, Peter Schuler expressed his appreciation to all our foster families who provide loving and caring homes for Waukesha County foster children. Following the ceremony, everyone was invited to eat (Taco Salad) and participate in training on creating "Life Books". This was one of the training topics previously suggested so I'm glad to see we were able to provide this training. For those of you who were not able to attend, but want more information about creating "Life Books" please contact Shari Rather. Finally, I want to thank Shari Rather and Lisa Roberts for coordinating this event and all the Permanency Services staff who attended. I want to extend my appreciation as well, so on behalf of our Department, THANK YOU!

We have several upcoming events including our Foundation Training that starts on June 2nd (Tuesday night). We are also happy to report that Jack Safro Toyota will sponsor our annual Foster Parent Appreciation Event on June 24th at Fox Brook Park in Brookfield from 3 pm to 8 pm. I'd like to thank Jack Safro Toyota for their continued support of foster care in Waukesha County. This will be their 4th year sponsoring this wonderful event. We appreciate their ongoing support!

I mentioned previously, the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Family will conduct an on-site review of child welfare in Waukesha County. The review will be held the week of August 24th. Twelve (12) cases will be randomly selected from our current caseload (cases opened prior to March 1st). Once a family case is selected, parents will be given an opportunity to participate or not. This review is voluntary so parents must sign releases of information to participate. The on-site reviewers will review the records and interview as many people involved in your foster child's life including the foster child (if old enough), birth parents or adoptive parents, foster parents, guardian ad litem (GAL), school representatives, therapists, mentors, the assigned social worker and anyone else who has information to share. In addition, we will have several focus groups including a focus group for foster care youth and foster parents. We like to get at least fifteen (15) foster parents to attend if possible. I'm hopeful some of our foster parents will be able to attend and share their experience with the reviewers. We are in the process of finalizing the schedule for the focus groups and will let you know as soon as possible so you can make arrangements to attend. Please contact Shari Rather if you have any specific questions about the review or focus group.

Summer is right around the corner, so I want to wish all the children and you a safe and enjoyable "summer vacation".

I would like to wish all of our Foster Fathers a very Happy Father's Day!!!

Jesse



- **Exit and Wait.** Remove yourself from the confrontation—don't be an audience for your child. Your attention and presence can be a powerful reinforcement. You might calmly say, "Yelling and talking to me in that tone of voice is not respectful, so I am going to leave right now and talk to you later."
- **Regain your composure** before addressing the situation. You are more effective when you're calm and collected.
- **Don't confuse this with a "teachable moment."** Trying to teach or implement an intervention during a power struggle is seldom effective.
- **Keep it short and to the point.** Say something neutral. Lecturing only fuels the fire.
- **Avoid arguing.** Arguing with a young person about their failure to follow your instructions maintains the struggle. It doesn't help kids to listen and mind.
- **Know when your buttons are being pushed.** Adolescents often attempt to push your buttons to keep you in the conflict. Don't get pulled in!
- **Misbehavior is not a personal attack on you.** Rather, it's the child's attempt to regain and maintain control.
- **Plan ahead and pre-teach!** Think about how you will handle potentially tough situations in advance. Talk with your child about expectations and consequences.
- **Energize and recharge!** Take time to relax and relieve stress. Don't spend that time thinking about the problem.

Once the power struggle is resolved, focus on restoring the relationship. Don't dwell on the past by bringing it up again: let everyone move forward.



As a foster parent, you need to take care of yourself. Stressful events such as power struggles can leave even the most seasoned parent feeling exhausted. That is why it is essential for you to develop strategies that help you to energize and recharge.

Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

June 4, 2009	6-9 PM
June 18, 2009	6-9 PM
July 9, 2009	6-9 PM
July 16, 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.

National Foster Care Month & Ribbon of Hope Photos



Senior Portraits for Youth in Care

Senior pictures are important to all youth! Unfortunately, youth in foster care are not always able to enjoy this experience with their friends and classmates. The goal of the Volunteer Photography program is to provide graduating seniors with the option and opportunity of receiving their Senior pictures.

This program was created to help foster youth and their families celebrate one very important accomplishment: high school graduation. A network of volunteer photographers is in place to help youth in foster care get their senior pictures to share with their family and friends. These pictures that are more than just pictures; they are important keepsakes from their high school years.



Participating youth will have the opportunity to purchase pictures at a significantly reduced rate.

For more information, please contact Jenna Czaplowski at: jczaplowski@wiadopt.org
414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063

Saturday, July 11: Family Portrait Day

10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

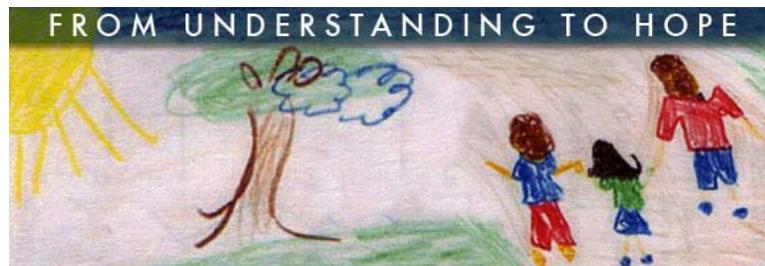
Gilbert Frenn Photography Studio
11401 W. National Avenue, West Allis
<http://www.frennphotography.com/>



We are very happy to announce our 4th Annual Family Portrait Day! **REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED FOR THIS EVENT.** Please call Jenna Czaplowski at ARW at 414-475-1246 to reserve a session time to have your family portrait taken.

Cost: Session is free. Pictures can be ordered for \$3 per sheet up to 10"x13"; Other sizes quoted at time of order.

Find statewide events on our Calendar of Events:
www.wifostercareandadoption.org or
www.wiadopt.org



Among our greatest hopes for our children is that they will be joyful, loving members of our families, and that they will have lives filled with contentment and meaningful relationships. For many parents, this hope seems beyond reach. This workshop is designed to empower parents during their journey with their children.

Bethany Christian Services-Wisconsin and Cornerstone Church have partnered to bring Dr. Karyn Purvis, PhD, who is the Director of the Texas Christian University Institute of Child Development and a developmental psychologist and adoption researcher. Co-author of *The Connected Child*, Karyn travels extensively, both nationally and internationally, providing dynamic training and consultation for families and professionals working with at-risk children.

Early Bird Registration and Payment must be received by **October 1, 2009**.
\$15 for a single attendee
\$20 for a married couple

Date: Saturday, October 10, 2009 Time: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
(lunch on your own)

For more information, or to print the registration form, please [visit their web-site](#).

Sponsored by Cornerstone Church and Bethany Christian Services

www.cornerstone-pca.com
www.bethany.org/wisconsin



June 2009 Foster Parent Spotlight

Lauren & Shane Radosevich



Shane and Lauren were both raised in Wisconsin, Lauren in Brookfield and Shane in New Berlin. They currently reside in Pewaukee. Shane and Lauren met each other at the teacher of the year dinner when they both were teaching in New Berlin, the music teacher introduced them. They have been

together for 7 years, married for five of them. Both of them are currently employed through the Elmbrook School District, Lauren for four years and Shane for three.

Shane and Lauren have three children, one biological child and two siblings they adopted through foster care system in Waukesha County. AJ will be three in June, Abby will be two in July, and Aiden just turned one. AJ was placed into the Radosevich's home at 10 months and Abby was brought home from the hospital 3 months later as a newborn. AJ and Abby were the only two placements they have had since being licensed. They do not currently have a placement "3 kids under 3 keep us pretty busy." Adopting the 2 kids and watching them grow, develop, and overcome delays from their neglect has been such a rewarding experience, it's amazing how far they have come. "Communicating and working with the birthparents is difficult when they show little or no interest but we have always tried our hardest in every way possible to keep them in the children's lives while they were in our care." As a family the Radosevich's, enjoy playing outside year round, going for walks, reading books, and going on vacations.

"Everything thus far has been positive, rewarding, and satisfying. Becoming foster parents was a mutual decision made even before marriage, we wanted to have children of our own and then foster, it ended up working in reverse order but we couldn't be any happier."

"Being teachers has given us a lot of background knowledge but receiving the information in a different context through trainings the department offers has been very beneficial. It has also been fun and helpful to get to know other foster parents for networking." Lauren and Shane look to family, friends, and neighbors for support.

Their advice for all foster parents is, "Go with the flow, be an advocate for the kids and enjoy them for who they are."



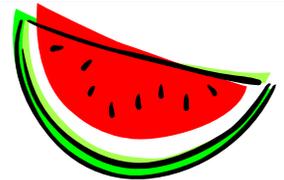
Date: June 24th, 2009

Time: 3:00-8:00 p.m.

This years picnic will be held at:

Fox Brook County Park

2925 N. Barker Rd.



Waukesha County Permanency Services would like to thank you for your commitment and unparalleled dedication to the foster care program. As a token of our

gratitude, we would like to invite your family to attend this years appreciation picnic. The day will be filled with food, games, prizes and fun! We sure hope you can make it!

This Event is Sponsored by:
Jack Safro Toyota

RSVP to Shari at
(262) 548-7267
or Michelle at (262) 896-6857 by
June 14th, 2009
Your parking pass will be sent to you.

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

April 2009 Placements
Regular Foster Care: 46 Children 3 Admitted 0 Discharged
Treatment Foster Care: 18 Children 0 Admitted 1 Discharged
Group Homes: 3 Children 0 Admitted 1 Discharged
Residential Care Facilities: 7 Children 0 Admitted 2 Discharged
Relative Placements: 27 Children 0 Admitted 8 Discharged

Social Workers:
Jennifer Alder 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.