

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
March 2012



The Challenges of Foster Care: Grief and Loss By: Adoption Resources of Wisconsin - ARW/FCARC

You can't help but get attached to a child in your care - whether he or she is with you for a few days or a few years. Just like most parents experience some sadness when their kids leave home for college or jobs, foster parents may also grieve when the kids in care leave...only the circumstances are often bittersweet and complex.

Foster parent grief isn't talked about much, but yet it's cited as one of the most common reasons for not continuing to foster. Months or years of care and love for a child who moves can leave a hole in the hearts and lives of foster families.

Sometimes parents grieve when they cannot bond with a child or cannot meet the needs of a child. Many grieve when they give a 30-day notice (of terminating the placement). The situation is fraught with emotion for all.

Stages of Grief and Loss

There are many ways to experience loss and express grief as there are people. One cries. Another is stoic. A child becomes defiant. A teen cannot sleep. Others *only* want to sleep. Some throw themselves into work.

Here are some examples of the stages of grief with some common examples of reactions foster parents may experience.

Denial

Parents may deny an attachment to a child. Some who have to give a 30-day notice, may deny any feelings of sadness but grieve even though they know that were unable to help. *"I won't miss him. He was so naughty."*

Anger

Parents may blame social services, the system, or some other person for a removal of a child. They focus on issues that are not at the heart of the matter. *"That social worker is responsible for Lula going back to her mom."*

Bargaining

It is not uncommon to try to substitute other people or activities to avoid experience grief. *"I will just take another nine-year old. He'll help me forget about Billy."*

Depression

Grieving has components of depression. A person feels constant tiredness, irritability, or inability to deal with life. It becomes hard to handle family, work, and marriage. *"I can't deal with these kids anymore. It all makes me feel like I can't do anything right. I am tired, cranky and worn out."*

Acceptance

In the end, grief over a loss diminishes and a sense of balance and well being returns. A foster parent acknowledges the losses and moves on. *"It's hard to see him go, but I know that each day of love and care I gave to that child was a blessing for him and me. I can deal with his move and do what I can to make it the best situation for all involved."*

Foster parents who do experience grief in foster care are likely to experience all of the above stages. A foster dad may become quiet and withdrawn one day, while he feels angry and denies feelings of loss in another.

Experience grief in foster care also happens to children in the home.

As one child says about his foster sister, "she learned to walk and talk at

our house. She stayed with us for over a year. After a while her dad did the stuff he needed to do to have her. He took classes and he promised he would be a good parent. After she visited him for a few days, she was given to him. When she left I was so sad. She had been part of the family, and I loved her so much!" (From *The Wisconsin Foster Care Handbook* <http://wifostercareandadoption.org/library/513/chapter5.pdf>.)

Guilt

Guilt can be another stage in the grieving process for foster parents. Parents often search themselves for what they did "wrong" and cannot share in the happiness even when the child's transition to a new home is a happy occasion. Others may feel guilty if they cannot continue to care for a child. According to a Wisconsin foster mom, another subtle but difficult situation occurs when foster parents love and provides for a child who cannot return that affection or bond with the parent. These parents have to find their hope in their sense of providing love and safety when there is little emotional and safety when there is little emotional connection in return.

Preparing to Let Go

Parents can do some things to prepare for the transitory nature of foster care.

Remember that fostering is not a guarantee of a forever placement from the start. This, of course, is especially difficult if you're a "concurrent" home - it takes a lot of courage to both prepare for adopting and prepare for reunifying children with their parents.

Keep a record of the child from day one. Take pictures of yourself and your families, the pets, the house, the inside of the house.

Babies or toddlers may not remember you, but those children can see the love you gave them in photos of their life when you loved and cared for them. Even in the ending is not what you would have chosen, photos, letters, and memorabilia can give them a glimpse of what was good and safe with you.

Life books are great tools, not only for children, but also for families. Create a life book reflecting your journey as a foster parent.

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Prospective Foster Parents need to do Part 1 of the training on the following website:

<http://www.wcwts.wisc.edu/foster-parent-training>

We will then meet to discuss the learning points and to answer your questions.

Thursday,
April 12, 2012
6-8 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.



Lisa's Corner

Lisa Roberts
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

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For more information, see our Lifebook tipsheet at <http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/650/lifebooks-parents.pdf>.

Acknowledge that children's sense of fear and loss when they move is probably greater than yours. Knowing that you supported a child through a difficult move, even if the placement with you was not a good fit and had to be changed, will help you deal with your grief.

Preparing for Separation

If possible, prepare for the separation before it occurs. Discuss it with workers. Ask to be included in decisions. Communicate your concerns and recommendation throughout the time a child is in your home.

Work with the birth family while the child is in your care. This frequently establishes a pattern for future communication after the child returns home. The child also fares much better if they see some continuity in their journey through foster care through contact with birth parents and the folks from former placements...even if the placement ends in a less-than-ideal way. In fact, that's probably when some extra contact is especially needed—for both of you.

When the Move is Happening

When it is determined where the child will go, prepare for separation with visits, conversations with the new family or birth family, and especially with the child who will be moving.

Talk to all of the members of your household about the upcoming move so that you are all on the same page during the stages of transition. If you're not sure how to do this, ask your social worker for help in how to share the information about the move and how to talk to your children. It helps to prepare what you will say.

Reach out when you or your spouse or children need extra support. Talk to your social workers, therapists, community or religious staff who understand the losses in foster care and can provide grief counseling.

In an ideal transition and when appropriate, there is continuity of contact with visits, letters, emails and phone calls after the move too.

Recognize that family members may grieve, and that they will do so in their own individual way. The children in your house may also experience grief and loss, whether they are children in care, birth, or adopted children. They may experience a loss even when living with the other child was a difficult experience. They may feel both relieved and sad that the child is gone. Then, like you, they may also feel guilty that they feel relieved!

Sharing Your Grief

Share your grief with your partner, the birth, foster and adopted children in your household as appropriate, and with workers and people in your support network who understand. Talk to foster parents involved with WAFPA (<http://wfapa.org>) and other foster parents.

Consider reflecting on the foster care you provide on a regular basis, and write your thoughts down. You can find a helpful **When a Child Leaves the Foster Home Debriefing Form** at: <http://family-works.com/forms/debrief.pdf>.

Assess what you will continue to do and examine what you can change. Good relationships are good only when they evolve and grow with changing situations. Try not to give up on yourself for what you have done.

Know that just as you will find grief and loss are interwoven in the extraordinary work you are doing, so you will find what you give to the children in your care, day by day, week by week, is immeasurable. Reflect on your mission as a foster parent. Let your heart soar, so that in times when the losses come, you will have the reserve to continue your commitment to the children who need you so much.

The Importance of Rituals

Establish rituals around the separation.

- Have a going away party, even if things didn't end in an ideal way.
- Pack the child's clothes together, or if that's not possible, pack your child's things respectfully.
- Talk about memories, even with young children.

Warning Signs of Grief

Grief that lasts too long or becomes too difficult, grief which interferes with work and disrupts family relationships are red flags for seeking support. When the grief is unremitting or becomes destructive, it's helpful to get help from a therapist.

Shari informed me that the focus of this month's newsletter is Grief and Loss. Although it's not the fun side of foster care, it is such an important topic to discuss. I see "Grief and Loss" being very connected to trauma and being trauma informed. Grief and loss is a fundamental part of the very nature of foster care; so, it is not a topic we can afford to shy away from. Children and bio-parents experience the grief and loss of their family as they had known it at the time of placement...foster parents grow to love and care so deeply for the children in their homes that no matter the final outcome of the case, grief and loss is involved. If the kids go home, which is the goal of our system, and often a happy and exciting time, the result is still grief and loss to the foster family. If the ultimate plan of a case ends up being TPR/adoption – that too can be a very happy and exciting time – but it also holds a component of grief and loss due to the finality of the biological family.

Foster parents are asked to take in children who often have extensive trauma histories, help the kids to manage their feelings of grief and loss as well as be prepared to manage their own grief and loss. We continue, as an agency, to talk extensively about Trauma and the fundamental characteristics of doing our work in a "trauma informed" way. One of those fundamental core characteristics of being "trauma informed" is TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF (the caregiver).

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for the extremely difficult and demanding job you do but also to encourage all of you to take care of yourselves while you are doing it. The workers are always a good source of support and understanding. Please make sure you reach out to them as needed. In addition, the Department contracts with St. Aemilian-Lakeside for "Caregiver Support". This program consists of a trauma-trained social worker who comes to your home as a support to you in dealing with these difficult topics and emotions. She is there to help process, support and provide guidance and suggestions. This program is available to all Level one and Level two foster homes that have a placement. Additionally, please do not be afraid to ask for and utilize respite care. Taking care of yourselves means taking a break sometimes and taking time to "re-energize"!

Lastly, I know everyone is very busy these days and often the idea of "one more thing" is stressful in and of itself. I believe that is the reason why our "foster parent support group" struggled to get off the ground a few years back. However, we offer on-going foster parent trainings, Annual Foster Parent Meeting, bi-monthly Parent Café's, annual Foster Parent Appreciation event as well as other opportunities to meet area foster parents. The best support is often from those who have had similar experiences. I encourage each of you to make it a goal of yours this year to connect with at least one other foster parent in the county who you can reach out to and support each other. Once again, I thank you for the wonderful work you do.

Lisa

On behalf of everyone here at Waukesha County Human Services, we would like to thank Hillcrest Elementary for their sock-hop fundraiser that raised 675 socks and slippers for our Clothing Closet. Their donation will make a difference in the lives of children and families in need. Thank you.



Coping with Anger

By: Adoption Resources of Wisconsin ARW/FCARC

Anger is a complex feeling. Maybe it doesn't feel that way when you're exploding with anger, but doesn't it seem that way afterwards? What was the thing that really got to you? How did you react? How did your body feel? How angry were you? But most importantly, what did you do about it?

Do you know that most anger comes from fear? Fear that you are not safe or the world is not a safe place for you. Anger is the stuff that helps us protect ourselves and can motivate us to make a situation right. It's the "fight or flight" reactions.

In prehistoric times, if you were scared of a tiger or a dinosaur, fighting or running away might just save you.

But in today's world, it's not usually as simple as fighting or running away. Our fears are more complex. Your anger may be intertwined with an immense sense of sadness, fear, and injustice, especially if you've been in the foster care system. You have a right to those feelings. But what should you do with them?

Know your triggers. What are your "triggers" - the comments, situation, and people who get to you almost right away. Maybe it's a certain tone that reminds you of someone in the past. Maybe it's yelling and swearing, which tends to be a trigger for a lot of people. Maybe the smell of cigarettes or alcohol automatically triggers some bad memories, which in turn cause you to be more uptight. Knowing your triggers will help you figure out when you might need to be extra patient, walk away, talk to a friend, listen to music or any number of coping skills.

Blow off steam. Run it out. Exercise. Swim. Run in place and do a crazy number of jumping jacks or sit ups. It sure is better than giving someone else control of you by letting them cause you to do or say things you will regret.

Write it out. Writing in a journal is a great way to talk about the things that get you angry.

Draw it out. Sometimes finding a quiet place to draw a picture or sketch will help your body work through some of your stress.

Do something that you love or enjoy, like listening to music, scrapbooking, skateboarding, etc. That can give you some time for your body to relax and give you the ability to rethink what made you so angry.

Talk it out. There are often two steps to talking things out. First you might just need to talk to someone who will listen, more or less neutrally. Sometimes it even helps to let that person know that you're just "venting" and they don't need to try to solve your problem for you. Or maybe the two of you together will be able to do some problem solving.

Then the second stop might be - but not always - to talk to the person who offended you. This may be the best way to handle a situation, but it's often the hardest. Try to use "I feel" statements as much as possible so the other person doesn't feel defensive. Say "I feel embarrassed when we're late for movies because I don't like crawling over people to get a good seat," rather than "You're never on time and I hate being late."

Sometimes it's just too hard to figure out what to say. Try to find someone to talk to who you can trust. If you're seeing a therapist but you don't feel comfortable enough to talk to him or her, consider finding a new therapist.

Get help. If you scream, hit, kick, hit or punch in a situation that does not require self defense or protecting someone else, you have anger issues that hurt you as well as others.

If you're not already seeing a therapist, you should consider seeing someone to help you with your anger issues. Anger often masks deeper feelings of

being afraid to be hurt.

Many youth in care as - well as many kids who have not faced the challenges you have faced - need to talk to a counselor about anger issues.

Life has been rough for you, and you may not have had adults around you who showed you how to deal with anger appropriately or they may have encouraged irrational anger by the way they acted.

There might also be a group you can join to work out issues. But ask for help - either individually or in group. You have a right to receive good therapy.

Martin Luther King, Jr. would not have been who he was without a deep sense of anger about the injustice of racism, but he directed his anger in productive ways.

As he said, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

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Training Offered By Waukesha County

Parent Café
March 15, 2012
5:30 PM

Center for Excellence
N4W22000 Bluemound Road
Waukesha

To register for childcare, RSVP or for questions call, 262-548-8080.



Foster Parent Foundation Series

3/10/12	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Module 1 & 2
3/24/12	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Module 3 & 5
4/14/12	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Module 4A & 4B
4/28/12	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Module 6 & 7
5/5/12	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Module 8 & 9

Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services

500 Riverview Avenue, Brookfield Room

Register online at: southernpartnership.wisc.edu

The Dark Side of Digital Technology: The Internet, Cell Phones and Social Media

May 1, 2012

6:00 - 9:00 PM

Cost: \$20 per person for webinar

Free in person at Waukesha County Human Services Building

Waukesha County Human Services Building

500 Riverview Avenue

Waukesha, WI 53188

Register with Shari Rather at 262-548-7267 if you are attending the in person free seminar at Waukesha County Human Services Center

Register online at: <http://socialmedia-youth.eventbrite.com> for Webinar

Training

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.

Kids Managing Anger (Parent and Child Class)

Mondays, March 5 - 26

5:30 - 7:00 PM

Co-creative Discipline

Tuesdays, March 6 - 27

6:00 - 7:30 PM

Adult Anger (Parent and Child Class)

Tuesdays, March 20 & 27

5:30 - 7:30 PM

Wednesday Workshops

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

5:30 - 7:00 PM



March 2012 Foster Parent Spotlight

Tom and Barbara Reilly



Tom and Barbara Reilly met each other through their two adoptive children. Jennifer and Matthew, who are only a few months apart in age and have

become best friends. The couple married in 2005, and now have a blended family of 8 children. Michael 28, Bethany and Andrea 25, Laura 23, Tiffany 21, Kevin 20, Matthew and Jennifer 12.

Both Barbara and Tom had done foster parenting for different agencies before meeting one another. After getting married they decided that they would like to continue fostering, and became licensed by Waukesha County. Barbara stated that over all their years of foster parenting, they have been placed with up to 75 children total.

The couple wants to help as much as possible, so right now they are sharing their license with Milwaukee County. Through this license, they are now placed with two children, a four-month-old boy and a 2-month-old girl. Barbara said that their two youngest of their children Jennifer and Matthew are very involved in this process and help out a lot with the little ones.

The couple stated they love doing foster care, which they see as being part of a solution to a bigger problem of abuse and neglect. They believe it is a privilege to welcome these children into their home, to love and care for them to make that connection until their families are ready. It is enjoyable for

them to build that relationship, trust, and to mentor; which will help build and reunite families. The biggest reward of foster parenting for the Reilly family is that every child is a miracle, and it is a privilege to build that bond which in turn helps them learn to enjoy the gift of life. They would like to continue being foster parents as long as they can.

Some people think you do it for the money, but it is about the children. We need to keep that focus and advocate for children with whatever the situation brings. Barbara's advice to other foster parents is that birth parents need to be encouraged and mentored as much as possible so that all are on the same page. At the end of the day, you need to support one another; the process is not always easy.

Greetings Foster Parents:

It is that time of year that I have Milwaukee Brewer Tickets available. I have tickets for the following games:



- May 9, 2012 against the Cincinnati Reds at 7:10 PM
- May 21, 2012 against the San Francisco Giants at 7:10 PM

Please email me if you are interested in a game and the number of tickets you need and I will forward you the tickets for use by you and your foster children only. If you cannot use the tickets, please return them to me in a timely manner. Just remember you need to use the tickets because the Brewers do keep track of the empty seats.

Hope to see you at the game,

Shari

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
Jen Barcus..... 262-542-2926
David Mersfelder 262-542-2926
Nikki Mertens..... 262-246-6180

Rebecca Hollister, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Mary Alice Grosser, Supervisor
Relative Licensing
262-548-7272

Shari Rather, Foster Care
Coordinator
262-548-7267

Libby Sinclair
Relative Licensing
262-548-7277

January 2012 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
38 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
10 Children

Group Homes:
4 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
12 Children

Relative Placements:
50 Children

Level 2 Foster Homes:
113 Homes

Level 1 Foster Homes:
34 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties
15 Homes

For Allegations of Abuse and
Neglect Support, please call:

FASPP
Norma Schoenberg
920-922-9627

Social Workers:

Jennifer Adler 262-548-7265

Bob Alioto 262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348

Kate Flansburg 262-896-6857

Laura Jahnke 262-548-7359

Maria Maurer 262-548-7345

Susan Peck 262-896-8574

Madeline Prange 262-548-7394

Janis Ramos 262-896-8069

Michael Reed 262-548-7347

Cindie Remshek 262-548-7639

Greg Rewolinski 262-548-7270

Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349

Kim Sampson 262-548-7273

Mark Sasso 262-548-7346

Linda Senger 262-548-7698

Deanna Stevlingson . 262-896-8570

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.

