

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
November 2009



Shared Parenting: Putting the Needs of Children First By Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Imagine your favorite potted plant. Now picture someone taking that plant and cutting it off where the plant meets the soil and sticking the remaining stem into a new pot of dirt. The plant doesn't thrive and yet you gave it a great new pot with fresh soil, water and organic fertilizer. Must be something wrong with that plant...

Or is it that we, as a system have just cut the child off from the roots of his family and taken him out of his familiar soil? What if we can help him to retain his roots while we're temporarily replanting him until the first pot is able to mend a few holes? (Thanks to the Institute of Human Services for the example.)

Shared parenting is the newest term for what some foster families have been doing all along—welcoming a relationship with the family of the child in care. IT happens successfully when foster parents and parents work together to raise children.

Toni, an experienced Wisconsin foster parent, says that, "Shared parenting involves opening your home to a child's family for visits, frequent communication and making decisions together."

Shared parenting is a philosophy that governs the way foster families and families involved with the system work together. It emphasizes the key role foster parents play in keeping children connected to their families, while at the same time allowing the children's parents to remain the experts—the parents—on their children. Foster parents are key in helping to give the natural parents credibility and confidence.

When kids in care see families working together and giving the okay to have a relationship with both families, they experience less stress and don't have to worry as much about loyalty to either family. Shared parenting can result in kids having shorter placements and quicker returns home. Even in cases where kids can't return home, shared parenting often helps kids put the pieces of their life together more easily.

Initial Meeting

Upon initially meeting with a child's family, try to get information from the parents about the child. Parents need to be empowered. They are an excellent resource for gaining insights into the needs of the child in your care. You might also ask if there are others (family friend, mentor, favorite aunt, grandparent, etc.) who could or should be involved in the parenting or caretaking process.

- Discuss the specific needs of the child and how the needs can be met. How will the IEP plan be implemented? When does he or she get meds? Is there an important blanket or bedtime ritual that should be maintained?
- Outline specifics such as schedules, roles, and responsibilities. Who will make the doctor's appointments? Will the child's parents and foster parents be able to attend parent-teacher conferences? How will the child get to the visits?
- Anticipate disagreements and discuss ways that you can work together to resolve them.
- Discuss the family's expectations about contacts and visits within the foster home, birth home and community. Are weekly visits enough? Are they doable with everyone's schedule? Can the child call the family whenever he wants or just at certain times of the day?

Developing connections

The following are some suggestions in initially developing this relationship.

- Welcome the child's family into your home, and set boundaries with

both the parents and the child about any areas that are off limits to others (usually bedrooms). Or go with the child and the family if the child wants to give a tour of the whole house.

- Encourage regular contact between parents and children, as approved by the placing agency. Help make parents feel comfortable visiting in the foster home, or work with the family to find a neutral spot where everyone feels comfortable (school, a mall, library, restaurant, etc.).
- Reassure the parents that your job as a foster parent is to keep the child safe and provide temporary care. Remind them that you are not a replacement for the child's parents.
- Encourage regular contact between the adults about the child's health, behavior, school, friends, community, and job.
- Take photos of the child within the foster home along with photos during visits with family. Give your child's family copies of these photos.
- If possible, ask the parents to schedule appointments for the child or try to accommodate the parents' schedule when setting up appointments.
- Encourage the birth parents to participate and have input into decisions about child care, school, medical, extra curricular activities, religious and cultural events.

It might be easy to become overwhelmed or get discouraged about all the extra things that you should do—especially because you're already doing a lot just to care for the children placed in your home.

However, it might be helpful if you try to imagine that you're the one who has a child in care and just how grateful you'd be if someone were doing those extra things to keep you involved.

Recognizing parents strengths

Recognize the strengths of the parents, and praise them for their efforts and successes. Examples include the following:

- "You sure have good ideas about how to handle Juan's tantrums. I'm glad you have shared this with me."
- "I sure appreciate seeing you every week. It helps Juan see that we get along."
- Turning negative attributes into positive strengths can be trying. Sometimes a parent may question the foster parent's quality of care of their child. Turn this into a positive strength by saying, "It seems like you really care about Juan. For his sake, I want to make sure that we agree on what to do next."
- You build trust if you respect the parent's strengths.

Be prepared for setbacks

There may be relapses by the parent, and they may not be interested or able to maintain the shared parenting relationship as they had in the past. Talk to your caseworker to keep them informed of the relationship with the birth parent and shared parenting process. You might also want to talk to other foster parents to see how they handled things when there were roadblocks between the families.

Strengthening the shared parenting relationship

Foster parents can promote a healthy relationship between child and parent(s) through not only their communication and attitude, but also through day-to-day actions, such as:

- Ask the birth parent to help with the child's Life book. Ask for pictures and stories.



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and Family Division

As we approach the end of the year, I want to remind all of our licensed foster parents that they need to complete their ongoing training requirements. It appears some of you have completed your training but we still have many that have not. The training can be a combination of reading articles or books on child development or foster care issues, on-line information on child welfare, etc., however it should also include face-to-face training that will enable you to interact with other foster parents. If you have any specific questions about the training requirements, please feel free to contact Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator.

It appears over 90% of our foster parents have computers. The good news is that we can communicate with your social worker any time during the day or night. The challenge is that we need to ensure confidentiality when we communicate with one another. Right now, we can accept email from you but it should not contain any information that would identify your foster child or their birth family. We currently have Secured Email however, we're on the verge of using another secured email system. Once this is operational, we will inform all of you. I anticipate this will make it easier for us to share confidential information about your foster child with minimal risk of violating confidentiality. In the meantime, please be careful about sending confidential information via email. On a related topic, please make sure you do NOT post any information or pictures of foster children on any Internet Social Network like **FACEBOOK**. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Shari Rather or your assigned social worker.

As some of you may know, the Children and Family Division has many programs that provide services for children with special needs. They include our **Birth to Three (B-3) Program**. We contract with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) to administer this program. Children with a 25% delay in their development are eligible for services. All children under the age of 3 that had a substantiated finding of child abuse/neglect must be referred to B-3 for a screening. This program does not have a waiting list; **Family Support Program**: funding is available (up to \$3,000 per child) for a child with a diagnosed development disability. This funding is used to support the caregiver and prevent institutional placement. This program has a waiting list however we do have some funding for crisis situations; Medicaid Home and **Community Waiver Children's Long Term Support Program (CLTS)** provides funding for children with special needs that have an institutional level of care as determined by a functional screen. If eligible, a child and family could receive a variety of services to enable the child to develop their individual functioning and to support the family; we also have a contract with **United Cerebral Palsy (UCP)** to provide respite care to families that have a child with special needs. All of these programs, services or funding are provided to enable the child to develop to their full potential and to support the family. As noted above, the child or family must meet the eligibility criteria for each specific program to obtain these services or funding. If you want or need more information please contact your social worker.

In closing, I want to wish everyone a safe and enjoyable Thanksgiving!!

Jesse

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

November 5, 2009 6-9 PM
November 19, 2009 6-9 PM

No Pre-Placement Training in December

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.

Training

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

Saturday January 9, 2010
Partners in Permanency 9-12
Cultural Issues in Placement 1-4

Saturday January 23, 2010
Maintaining Family Connectiveness 9-12
Guidance and Positive Discipline 1-4

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

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.

Controlling Conflict in the Family

Mondays, November 30 - December 21
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

Tuesdays, December 1 - 22
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.



Shared Parenting: Putting the Needs of Children First— Continued from Page 1

- Have children draw pictures, write stories or poems for their parents.
- Invite the birth parents to join in the child's favorite activity with the foster family (family bike ride, playing a board game).
- Offer to celebrate special events such as birthday or other family events by inviting your child's family to your home or restaurant.
- Once a child has been returned home to his or her family, offer to maintain contact through phone calls and provide support to the family, as approved by the supervising agency.

Foster parents are frequently recognized for helping the children in their care open doors so that the kids can fly on their own. But as a foster parent, you also have a great opportunity to help not just the child, but for his or her family as a whole. As the old adage says, "Give your children roots and wings." Thanks to the many foster parents who are helping to keep those roots intact.

Here Come the Holidays By the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

Halloween has passed, and the winter holidays are almost upon us; symbols of merriment and good cheer are starting to appear. Many of us have mixed feelings about the holidays. However, for children in foster care, especially those who have recently been placed, these weeks may be full of more challenging feelings and experiences than for other children and families.

Since getting together with extended family and friends is a big part of the season, we have listed some ideas for helping families and children in foster care handle these get-togethers with a little less stress.

- Talk about the season; explain what events you celebrate and why. Describe what your holiday celebrations are like: noisy or quiet, formal or casual, large groups or small. Let the child share about his or her family celebrations and customs.
- Work with the birth family, if appropriate, to have the child spend time with his or her birth family or invite the birth family over for a gathering.
- Try to introduce children to members of your extended family in person before the major holiday gatherings or show them pictures of people they might meet.
- Make sure there are gifts for children in foster care if there is a gift exchange. Some suggestions include: mittens, scarves, earrings, bracelets, fun socks, board games or common toys such as trucks or books. Give your family specific suggestions.
- Go over basic manners such as saying "please" and "thank you." Explain the expectations of children prior to the celebration. Role-play if you can; it can be fun and instructive.
- Remember: Information about children in foster care and their families is **CONFIDENTIAL**; remind the children that they don't have to talk about their particular situation with others, and let them know that you will be available to change the subject. Remind others that personal information about children in foster care and their birth families cannot be discussed.
- Be prepared for the sadness and grief that child in foster care may experience, and respect their feelings. Talk about their feelings in age appropriate ways, and give them time and space to grieve. Remember that grief takes many forms.

Open discussions and good preparation can make this holiday much more enjoyable for everyone—including you!

Many of these suggestions came from Carrie Craft who writes articles about foster care and adoption for About.com. See this article and others she has authored at: <http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>

All of us at Waukesha County wish you a joyful holiday season.



Foster Parents and Birth Parents: Working Together During the Holidays By the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

Holidays and other special events allow foster parents the wonderful opportunity for creating lasting memories and continuing family traditions. However, holidays can stir up mixed feelings and conflicting emotions for children in foster care. Norma Schoenberg, foster and adoptive parent from Fond du Lac, volunteered to share her suggestions on how foster parents can effectively and positively interact with birth parents during the holidays.

- **Develop positive relationships with the birth family.** Communication, consideration, and respect are essential components in promoting and enhancing positive working relationships with birth families. Talk to the children placed in your home and their birth parents about your family traditions and beliefs and theirs to help develop mutual understanding, encourage respect for one another, and further build relationships.
- **Encourage children to make cards and additional phone calls** to their birth parents during the holidays and other special occasions that occur throughout the year. If you participate in gift exchanges, never try to out-perform the birth parents. Remember that sentimental gifts, whether given or received, can be more valuable than any item that was purchased at a store.
- **Give birth families the opportunity of celebrating the holiday with their children first** before their children celebrate with the foster family.
- **Provide the child with a disposable camera** when they visit their family, especially during the holidays. When they return, you can develop the pictures for posting in their Life book, and they can share special photo memories about times with their birth family.

Recommended Resources About Holidays with Foster Children

A Guidebook for Raising Foster Children by Susan McNair Blatt

"7 Ways to Prepare Foster Children for Holiday Get-Togethers."
by Carrie Craft (2006)
<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/fosterholiday.htm>

"Parents as Partners: How Birth Families and Foster Parents can Work Together."
Foster Care Support Network (February 2005)

"How Do You Manage the Holidays?" by Karen LaShaw; Fostering Perspectives; Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1997)
http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol2no1/how_do_you_manage.htm

"Religious Differences and the Holidays" by John McMahon; Fostering Perspectives; Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1997)
http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol2no1/religious_differences_holidays.htm

"Expect Weird Responses From Foster Kids Towards The Holidays" by Jo Ann Wetzel (2006)
<http://library.adoption.com/foster-parenting-and-adoption/expect-weird-responses-from-foster-kids-toward-the-holidays/article/1653/1.html>

"Don't Forget Gifts of Toys for Teens by Jo Ann Wetzel
<http://www.westworld.com/~barbara/jaw2.html>



We encourage you and your family to get your seasonal flu shot and the H₁N₁ flu shot. If you have a foster care placement, we require a parent or legal guardian to sign the authorization forms for one or both of the flu shots. As always, please consult your doctor and review any concerns with your social worker.



Waukesha County supports the National Children's Study.
For more information go to www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov

November 2009 Foster Parent Spotlight

Traci Kouhel



Traci was born in Waukesha. She stayed in Wisconsin until she finished college in 1987. She then moved to Florida until 2000. At that time, she moved back to Waukesha to be closer to her family.

Traci is employed through Children's Hospital and Health System in Milwaukee. She is a nurse case manager for Children's Community health Plan. Traci has two sons, Zakary is 17 and is a senior at Waukesha North High School. Adam is 13 and is an eighth grader at Horning Middle School. Traci and her sons enjoy spending time outdoors together. They particularly love walks and going to parks.

Traci had considered Foster parenting for a number of years. However, once she began working in Public Health, she realized the need in the community for good foster homes. She seriously began exploring the opportunity a year ago and then discussed the possibility with her sons, and what being a foster home might mean for them as well. They all became in agreement that they would enjoy becoming a foster home for children in Waukesha County. Traci has now attended many foster parent trainings and has three more trainings to complete. She currently has two placements in her household which are transitioning to a new home.

"The most difficult part of fostering has been how slow a process it is and how many months and sometimes years it takes in order for the children to have a permanent home, either back with the biological parent or in an adoptive home." Traci receives a lot of support from her family, especially her sister and

niece. Her co-workers have also been supportive, especially when she received her first placements. Traci also has friends who have encouraged her all along the way. Her support systems have helped her be the best foster parent she could be. "I could never have done this without their support and understanding."

The experiences of being a foster parent for Traci have been gratifying, educational, fun, exhausting at times, and rewarding in more ways than she imagined. The most rewarding aspect of fostering has been "knowing that we are making the difference in a child's life by providing them with a safe, nurturing and loving home." Traci's advice for other foster parents is to "expect the unexpected," as Traci never envisioned herself with two placements at once!



The Clothing Closet is now organized and great clothing is available for your foster child. Summer clothes have been packed up and the winter clothes are available. Stop by anytime and take a look. There is a lot of quality clothes for the taking.

A special thank you to Virginia Steilen for all of her work she put into the organization of the closet.

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
262-246-6180

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care
Coordinator
262-548-7267

September 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
40 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
14 Children

Group Homes:
3 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
3 Children

Relative Placements:
57 Children

Social Workers:

Bob Alioto 262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser 262-548-7261

Angie Briggs 262-548-7275

Jennifer Eiler 262-548-7260

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

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.

Jack Safro
Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury
Lexus•Infiniti•Scion