

# Advisor

**FOSTER FAMILY  
APPRECIATION MONTH**

**HEALING FROM FOOD  
INSECURITY**

**SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS  
FOR FOSTER PARENTS**

**BULLIES NEVER WIN**

**THE FIRST DAY  
WITH A NEW  
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**WHAT I WISH I HAD  
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**HELPING KIDS WHEN  
THEY WORRY**

**CAREGIVING  
SUPPORT FOR  
DIFFICULT TIMES**

**CREATING A  
WELCOME BOOK**

**GOODS & SERVICES  
VOUCHERS**



# Advisor

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## OUR MISSION

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association exists to support and encourage Foster families through education and advocacy, helping create healthy homes, positive environments, and brighter futures for children and youth across the province.

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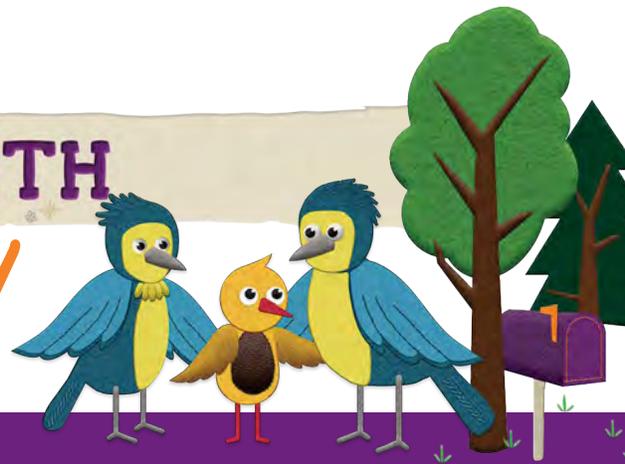
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October is

# FOSTER FAMILIES MONTH

IT'S A TIME TO CELEBRATE

*You!*



In case we don't meet in person this year, we'd like to express our thanks to you for all you do in supporting families.

In appreciation, the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association is offering each Foster Family a \$25 gift card to each Foster Family. You can select your gift from a wide range of retailers.



To receive your gift, use your web browser to visit this link,  
[saskfosterfamilies.ca/october2021](https://saskfosterfamilies.ca/october2021)  
and follow the instructions that appear.

You'll be asked to either sign in to your existing SFFA Member Portal account or create a new one. Once you're signed in, you can select your gift card.

When creating a new account, if our membership database does not have your email address on file, a message will appear to call the SFFA at **306.975.1591** and a representative will assist you with updating your information and sending your personalized link.

**Families are required to select their gift card on or before November 1st, 2021**

Thank you again, for the commitment you make to children and families, each and every day. Our warmest wishes from the entire SFFA team.

**Deb Davies,**

Executive Director, Saskatchewan Foster Families Association



# HEALING FROM FOOD INSECURITY: *Beyond the Stash*

By Katja Rowell, M.D.



Whether a child is 15 days or 15 years old, feeding and nurturing through shared meals is a powerful way to deepen attachment. But the family table is not always an easy place for children in adoption and foster care. Unfortunately, conflict and concerns around food, weight, and eating habits are common. When conflict defines interactions around food, trust and attachment can suffer and children may continue to struggle with eating.

Providing food is a powerful way to help children feel safe and cared for. Lynette, a seasoned foster mom, described a meal that made a big impact on her family. “We had a 15-year-old boy in foster care with a history of runaway episodes,” she recalls. “He was gone for about 30 hours. When he came back, we told him we’d been scared, made sure he was safe, and threw a box of mac-n-cheese on the stove to get him some comfort food. That floored him. It turns out that he’d been denied food in his prior home after his running. I think it helped him trust us more than anything else could have.”

Parents want to raise children who are healthy and happy, and may think that trying to get children to eat more, less, or different foods will help. For children who have experienced food insecurity or trauma, healing the trauma and anxiety around food is key to helping children learn to eat a variety of foods in ways and amounts that support health and well-being.

### Food or Caregiving Insecurity and Survival Behaviors

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When children are not fed reliably, have to compete for food, or do not get enough food, this leads to an anxious relationship and

even a preoccupation with food. It can take weeks, months, and even years of reliable feeding for that trust in others and in their own bodies to build. A loss of a caregiver, even at a few days old, can teach a developing brain that caregivers may suddenly no longer be present or cannot necessarily be trusted to meet the child’s needs. Even children who had their basic needs met, but have had caregivers change whether due to death, foster or kinship care, or adoption, can develop food preoccupation, excessively turn to food for soothing, or show survival or “hoarding” behaviors that can look like:

- Eating quickly, gobbling or stuffing food
- Sneaking or hiding food
- Not eating at mealtimes but eating secretly or alone
- Eating large quantities
- Becoming upset if someone eats off their plate or shared bowls
- Getting upset if food is limited or taken away
- Eating faster if asked to slow down
- Eating only familiar and “safe” foods

### It’s Not the Pizza Rolls—Trauma, Self-Soothing, and Food

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By age 14, Tara had been through multiple placements. Her ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) score was high. She was self-harming and struggling with suicidal thoughts. Diagnosed with “obesity,” her care providers were told that their priority was to get Tara to lose 30 pounds. Tara’s favorite pizza rolls were banned, Tara and her foster parents fought over her diet plan, she avoided mealtimes, and binged when she had the chance. In therapy she shared that eating often calmed her when she felt anxious. Tara gained five pounds in six weeks.

In addition to experiencing food insecurity, Tara, like many before her, learned to use food as an available coping/self-regulation strategy around trauma and difficult feelings. Using food as one way to self-soothe is common in healthy adults. “Numbing out” with food, or eating that feels out-of-control as the main or only method of self-soothing is a problem long-term. Reframing “overeating” as a behavior that may have served a purpose in the past can help.

Helping children and teens address trauma and find other coping strategies will help heal their relationship with food. Ways to help children and teens self-regulate, and connect with their bodies and tune in to hunger and fullness cues include:

- Singing, making music, or music therapy
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Making art or art therapy
- Swinging, bouncing or spinning—an occupational therapist can provide suggestions for your child’s sensory preferences if necessary
- Meditation or breathing exercises (see apps and online resources)
- Walking or playing sports
- Therapy focused on play, or somatic (body) experiences

### Healing Food Anxieties

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#### To stash or not to stash

Many resources on hoarding advise allowing children to have snacks in their backpack, carry food, or even have containers of food in the bedroom. Anneliese, mother of one adopted and one biological son, recalls that the main feeding advice she got from her social worker was to let her son carry around a baggy of carrots: “I just didn’t think that was going to help.” Other experts advise parents to avoid the stash

and serve regular meals and snacks. Still others may suggest locks on pantry doors. The reality is, there is no one-size-fits-all answer (but locks can undermine trust, don't address underlying challenges, and are not generally recommended).

Parents may offer a stash and see how things go. The stash may help at first, and the child may lose interest with time. If a child has a meltdown when his granola bar is taken away, allow him to carry it. Follow his lead. But the parent also has to be absolutely reliable about regularly providing food. Parents may need to offer food more frequently in the first days of placement, perhaps every hour or so, then over a few days, spacing out to a more typical routine.

Another concern with a stash is that when a child is allowed to get food whenever they want, they may still feel responsible for getting their own care. Or they may eat it all between mealtimes, which undermines appetite. It is also a missed opportunity to nurture and deepen attachment. To help bonding and a sense of security, food should be provided by parents at shared meal and snack times when possible.

Consider three-year-old Arielle, who was growing steadily at the 85th percentile when she was adopted at 11 months. Her birth mother was large so the pediatrician recommended small portions to "prevent obesity." Arielle soon began to beg for food most of the day. Worn down from trying to keep food away from Arielle for two years, mom reached out for help and was advised to have a "healthy" snack drawer just for Arielle—but she immediately ate the food and cried for more. In this case, Arielle's non-stop pestering

for food was not the hoarding behavior of a child arriving from a place of food insecurity, it was actually due to months of trying to get her to eat less (restriction). Hoarding can be due to past or current food/caregiving insecurity, or not getting enough food reliably. Arielle's stash wasn't working.

### **Reassure Children with Words and Actions**

One foster mom had a little boy she couldn't keep out of the fridge. He occasionally ate to the point of making himself sick. Mom didn't want to lock up food. Instead, she assigned him a refrigerator drawer. She stocked it with familiar food and told him that the drawer would always be full, and while he could not take food at random times, the drawer was his. He checked the drawer often, with Mom's reassurance that it was his food, and he could help choose from it for meals and snack times. Mom made certain it was never empty, and gradually he forgot about it.

### **Reliably Offer Balanced and Filling Meals and Snacks**

While parents can allow a stash if it works for their child, the best way to lessen hoarding behaviors is to lessen anxiety around food. Mia adopted two brothers at age five and seven. She describes how they reassured the boys, "Sam had some hoarding issues, but it didn't last long. We let it run its course. We chose not to have food available to the boys all day and night. I didn't think it would reassure them. I fed them regularly and sat and ate with them. They pretty quickly learned to trust they would get fed."

### **Avoid Sugar Anxiety**

Eight-year-old Yasmeen was adopted as a preschooler. Yasmeen's parents didn't allow sugar so she wouldn't become

"addicted." At a friend's house while baking cookies, Yasmeen ate spoonfuls of sugar straight from the bowl. Keeping sugar away from Yasmeen wasn't helping her learn to manage it. Yasmeen's parents were encouraged to allow her to have sweets at least once a day with a meal or snack, and sometimes to enjoy ice cream out or bake cookies at home. They were also encouraged to not talk about foods being "good" or "bad." Yasmeen ate a lot of sweets in the beginning, but a few months in, she was no longer obsessed with dessert and had stopped the out-of-control eating when she had access.

### **Avoid Reinforcing the Anxiety of Food Insecurity**

Many children who experienced food insecurity have initial behaviors that scare parents, especially if the child is bigger than average. Even if a young person is labeled as "obese" or "overweight," they can still feel food insecure. Research links food insecurity and binge eating with higher weight into adulthood. It makes sense. If enough food isn't reliably available, eating as much as possible when it is around is rational and protective. Trauma, high ACEs scores, and social determinants of health (poverty and access to health care for example) are reliably linked with poor health outcomes.

For many children and teens, attempts to limit their intake will make them more anxious and worsen food-seeking behaviors, as happened with Tara, described earlier. Tara's foster parents realized that despite all their efforts to control Tara's portions and push vegetables, she was gaining rather than losing weight. And they are far from alone. Decades of research show that

diets (efforts to get people to eat less to weigh less) fail in the general public 90 to 95 percent of the time, with more than half ending up heavier. Teens who diet experience more depression and disordered eating and tend to end up heavier than teens who practice “intuitive” eating, where they eat based on hunger and fullness. Dieting is also a major risk factor for developing life-threatening eating disorders.

It is critical to address a child’s initial food anxiety with nurturing, reliable feeding, even allowing the child to “overeat” while they learn to trust their cues of hunger and fullness. These children’s food regulation skills are not gone, but buried, and they can learn to tune in to hunger and fullness cues. Trauma and strong emotions can make it harder to listen to their bodies. Addressing trauma through healing relationships and building resilience is heart-healthy. Focusing on building connection and trust and helping children find resources to regulate their emotions and feel safe will help children and teens grow up to have a healthy relationship with food and their bodies. A trauma-informed, non-diet dietitian or therapist can help.

### Consider Cultural Food Differences

Remember that many children may come to you with very different experiences with food, especially if they are from another country or a different racial or cultural background. Being presented with completely new foods can be very scary and anxiety-producing for children. Be sure to ask your children about what foods they are used to eating and what they enjoy, then find a way to make some of those favorites a regular part of their meals. (If the children aren’t old enough, you can check with your agency, birth family members, or their former foster parent to

ask more about the types of foods they are used to.) You might find a couple of good options for takeout, learn to make their favorite comfort food, or make a plan to cook with them. Working together can help build attachment and show them you respect who they are.

### Tips to Reduce Food Anxiety

Create a home and family environment where everyone is valued and consistently sent messages that they are safe and cared for.

- Focus on healing trauma, forging a trusting connection, and healthy behaviors, rather than weight.
- Structure is critical. Offer balanced and tasty meals and snacks every two to four hours. If you go to the park, bring food with you.
- Don’t shame them for foods they like or were served routinely. Try not to use words like “junk” or “crap.” Try neutral words like “fast” or “prepared” foods.
- Particularly if your child is of a different cultural or ethnic background, they may be missing familiar foods. Find out what they are used to eating and learn how to make or buy it.
- Include foods that they want to eat along with the foods your family enjoys.
- One caring adult eating with a child counts as a family meal.
- Serve meals and sit-down snacks more frequently at first or if a child is healing from food preoccupation.
- Offer reassurance: “There will always be enough food.”
- Aim for pleasant family meals—if you’re battling over broccoli or a therapy task, that’s not helping them feel secure.
- Include fat, protein, and carbs. A snack might be whole-wheat crackers with cream cheese

and apple slices, or cereal, milk and a banana.

- Feed with the Division of Responsibility. At meals and snacks, they get to eat as much or as little as they want from what you provide. Even if they eat a lot initially, this sense of control will reassure them.
- Always provide at least one food they are likely to eat. They need to feel that they can come to the table and their hunger will be satisfied.
- Invite children and teens to help cook and meal-plan. You can say, “We’re having chicken and lentils for dinner. Would you like cornbread or tater-tots with that?” Resist the urge to argue or pressure, even if they refuse food they chose.
- Let them know that they may spit out any food they don’t want to swallow into a paper napkin. Children are more likely to try a new food if they can spit it out, particularly if they have a history of gagging or vomiting episodes.
- Don’t battle over manners right away. Lead by example.
- Serve foods family-style so a child can serve themselves and feel more in control. This also stops battles that begin when a pre-plated meal is served to the child who might erupt over something on his plate. (Clients tell me this is the number one tip to lessen power struggles.)
- Modify family-style if shared serving bowls increases anxiety or conflict between siblings. This might look like adults putting half a cup of taco meat and three taco shells on each plate and allowing children to serve themselves unlimited beans, lettuce, and rice.

*Source: North American Council on Adoptable Children, nacac.org.*



## TIPS FOR FOSTER PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

**W**hile social media has changed the way the world communicates, protecting the privacy of foster children is a contractual expectation of foster parents. We would like to remind all foster parents that the foster children in your care are entitled to privacy. You are expected to refrain from posting any identifying information regarding children in care through social media.

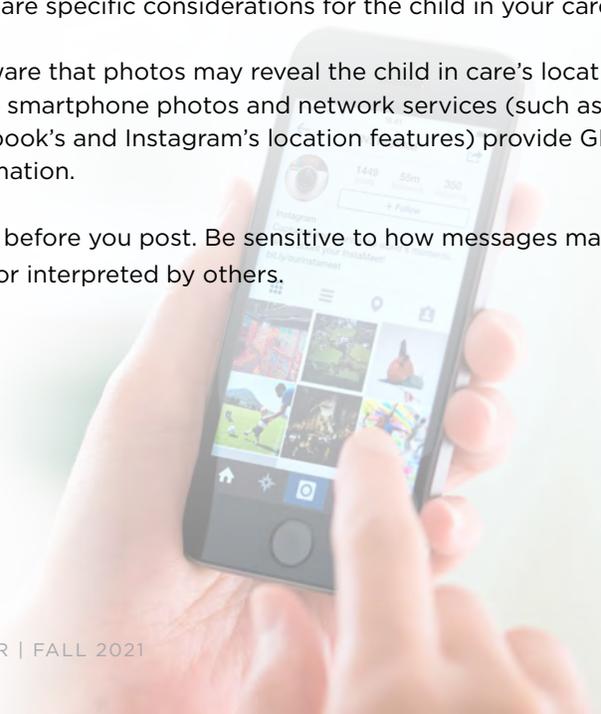
Please ensure that all well-meaning friends, neighbors and family are aware that pictures of your foster children are not to be posted and your children are not to be in any other way identified. Be mindful that this can have an undesirable impact for children in foster care, their families and their foster caregivers.

If permitted by the agency, you may use social media for support and to share information with other foster parents and caregivers.

Talk with your caseworker about agency policies. Ask about guidelines for your social media communication between your foster child's family and with community agencies, other foster parents and caregivers, and the agency staff. Find out whether there are specific considerations for the child in your care.

Be aware that photos may reveal the child in care's location. Some smartphone photos and network services (such as Facebook's and Instagram's location features) provide GPS information.

Think before you post. Be sensitive to how messages may be seen or interpreted by others.



## Video call apps for staying in touch with family and friends

**T**he whole world is familiar with Zoom now, but it's not the only video chat option. In fact, if you're looking for a video chat app to stay in touch with family and friends (rather than coworkers), there may be other options that work better for you. Here are some of the best video call apps to try. Best of all, every single one is free!

**Skype:** An oldie but a goodie, Skype works on computer and mobile devices and can be used to make regular phone calls as well as video calls with up to 24 people at a time.

**FaceTime:** With FaceTime, iPhone, iPad, and Mac users can easily connect for video chats with up to 32 people.

**Duo:** Duo is Android users' answer to FaceTime, although you don't have to have an Android device to use Duo. So, if your group includes both Apple and Android adherents, this app covers both for up to 12 people.

**Houseparty:** As the name suggests, Houseparty isn't the app for your business meetings. It's especially good for spontaneous gatherings, as the app notifies you when your friends are online. Video calls are limited to eight participants.

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## Free photo editing

Avoid splurging on expensive photo software and instead try editing images for free with these apps:

**Pixlr** - [www.pixlr.com](http://www.pixlr.com)

**Paint.Net** - [www.getpaint.net](http://www.getpaint.net)

**GIIMP** - [www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)



# BULLIES NEVER WIN

**O**n the heels of this year's anticipated return to school, children across the country have started getting back into their routines, spending their days with friends and classmates. But unfortunately, a lot of our nation's youth also find themselves spending time with bullies and aggressors.

According to the Promoting Relationships & Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet), a network of researchers and organizations shedding a light on bullying prevention, 75 per cent of people say they have been affected by bullying. This can take shape either as a victim, a bystander or an aggressor, and includes three primary forms of bullying:

- Physical bullying, which can take the form of hitting, destruction of property and physical humiliation;
- Verbal bullying, which can include teasing, threats and name-calling; and
- Social bullying, which can include rumours, gossip and exclusion with the intent of lowering the victim's social worth among their peers.

Additionally, the role that technology plays in day-to-day life has con-

tributed to the rise of cyber-bullying. This means that victims aren't easily able to escape the torment—bullying has become a 24-hour-a-day phenomenon, and has caused children to not even feel safe in their own homes. PREVNet reports that one in five teenagers report being victimized electronically, a number which has been steadily on the rise since the Internet and smartphones became ubiquitous.

Be on the lookout for signs of your child being bullied. These are numerous and varied, but can include: heightened anxiety, low self-esteem and excessive self-deprecation, low performance in school, visible injuries, irritability, unhappiness, withdrawal from activities they once enjoyed, isolation and fear of going to school.

Conversely, you should also look for signs that your child may be a bully. These signs can include: aggression, manipulative behaviour, unexplained money or items and a minimal concern for others' feelings.

Your role in the bullying discussion is simple, yet crucial, and begins long before your child is put in a situation where bullying may arise. Open a conversation with your child and make it clear that bully-

ing is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Let them know you will always be prepared to listen and be their advocate. If your child is being bullied, they won't always be open to discussing it unless they know they can trust you. Additionally, many children will not report cyber-bullying incidents to their parents for fear that their phone or computer will be confiscated or restricted. Make it clear that this will not be the case if such a situation arises.

If your child tells you that they are being bullied, document the bullying as best as you can. Keep text messages, emails and any other examples that demonstrate the inappropriate behaviour. Report the bullying to the proper authorities—either school administrators or police, depending on the severity. Monitor progress in managing to the desired change and be vigilant in follow-up to ensure that the bully behaviour stops.

Bullying can escalate quickly and your intervention can make a difference in your child's quality of life, both in the short and long-term.

Source: <https://canadasafetycouncil.org/bullies-never-win/>



# The First Day With A New Foster Child

**T**he impending arrival of a new foster child can bring chaos. You may get the call only a short time before the child is set to arrive and the hours or minutes become a race to ready your family, yourself and your home for a new family member. You may have spent the past hour making phone calls, gathering clothes, tidying a room or cleaning all the toilets in the house.

When bringing home a newborn, most people are well versed in what to do. Even for first time parents, there are a myriad of books and advice available. But there are no guides written about bringing home a two year old or a six year old or an eleven year old or even a fifteen year old.

You may be anxious or stressed or feel sick to your stomach, but when you meet your child for the first time, it's time to take a deep

breath, put all of the day's worries aside and greet him or her like you are overjoyed to make their acquaintance (even if you're not). Smile, get down on their level and offer your hand. If they come in for a hug, reciprocate with warmth.

**“ Giving the child age-appropriate control of themselves and their belongings is a good start.**

While each situation has its own unique circumstances, there are some things you can do to make that first day easier for you and for your new child.

## **Introductions**

Be sure to introduce everyone in the family immediately, including the pets. A child cannot integrate into a new environment if there are

people or animals there that they do not know. If someone isn't home when the child arrives, show the child a picture of that person (if possible) and be sure to introduce that individual when they return.

## **Bathroom**

The first place to show a child is the bathroom. Let them know that they can use it at any time without asking (unless they need help). Ask younger children if they have to go right then. Little ones may be afraid to go to the bathroom right away, so be on the lookout for signs that they have to go and ask them repeatedly (and privately) if necessary.

## **Food**

When children arrive at a new home, they are often hungry. It helps to have child-friendly meals and snacks on hand for arrival. Have the food ready to go if it is near mealtime. Offer them a couple of choices, but not so many that

it becomes overwhelming. Most foster parents find that there are few children who will turn down pizza, chicken, spaghetti or chicken tenders even if they are hungry. Be sure to offer both food and drink because some children won't ask, even if they are parched or starving.

#### **Tour**

The tour may come before or after the meal/snack, depending on the child. An older kid may need to get his bearings before sitting down to eat, while a younger child may want the comfort of food in a scary situation. Gauge your child's reaction, ask if they would like to sit down and eat or have tour of the house first. Be sure to show the child every room and tell him where he can and cannot be without supervision, as we

#### **Control**

Keep in the forefront of your mind what your foster child has been through in the past days or hours. Regardless of the transition, they are likely coming from situation they know to a situation that is unknown. What they are craving more than anything is control and security. It is your job to give that to them to the best of your ability.

Giving the child age-appropriate control of themselves and their belongings is a good start. Allow them to keep their coat and shoes on or take them off. Allow them to hold onto their things, leave them by the door or put them in their room. You can also give the child choices when it comes to what they want to eat, where they want to sit, what they want to do or what they want to wear. Think of other ways you can restore control to your child in a circumstance that is completely out of their control. It is as possible safety issues.

#### **Comfort**

The first day with a child is all about comfort. Do everything

in your power to provide him or her with a sense of comfort and stability. Think about what you would want to do, feel, eat, see or hear on your first day in a new home. How would you like to be treated? What would put you at ease? Along with control, providing a child with comfort can go a long way in making a child feel secure and at ease.

**“Prepare yourself for a long night and put yourself in your child's shoes over and over again to keep perspective.”**

#### **Levity**

Try to distract your child from the heaviness of the day. See if he or she wants to sit down and watch TV, play a video game, do a craft, play in the yard or help you make dinner. Offer a few options to bring some levity to your home and allow him or her to relax.

#### **Privacy**

Give your child as much age-appropriate privacy and space as possible. Don't accompany him or her to the bathroom unless he or she asks you to. Allow the child to change by himself or herself with the door shut unless he or she asks for or needs your help. Be sure to knock on a closed door before entering and respect your child's privacy when bathing or showering. Even offer your child some time alone in his or her room if it is safe and appropriate.

#### **Inform & Ask**

Throughout the entire first day, keep your child informed of what will happen next. Knowing a plan can help give some children a sense of security. Keep your

plans simple and don't make any promises you can't deliver 100%.

Whenever possible, give your child some say in whether something will happen or the order in which it occurs. For instance, you may ask them, "do you want to take a bath tonight before bed?" Or, if they need a bath, you might say, "You need to take a bath before bedtime. Would you like to watch TV for an hour and then take a bath or take a bath and then watch TV?" This approach accomplishes what needs to be done, but allows the child some control over how it happens.

#### **Rules**

At some point during the day, be sure to go over the most basic rules in the house to keep everyone safe. Stick to general and important rules on the first day. It's not the time to go over every nuance and detail, but to have a sit down mini-meeting that lays out the non-negotiable house rules and clearly states what the consequences would be for breaking them.

Many people don't want to talk about this on the first day because they want things to be as warm and welcoming as possible for the child, but this is actually something the child WANTS and NEEDS to know.

They may have come from a situation where they experienced abuse or a very chaotic life. Setting boundaries will make them feel safe while laying out the consequences for breaking the rules will begin to address any fears they may have about being abused in your home.

Be sure to ask older children if they have any questions about the rules and give thoughtful answers (you should know these answers ahead of time). They live in your

*Continued...*

home and they are expected to follow your rules, but they should also be given the opportunity to understand why you have them.

### Have a little welcome pack

This is a day of mixed emotions for this child. On their first day home, they will likely be feeling nervous and likely even scared. Having a small welcome gift will let them know that you are happy to have them there. It's also a nice ice breaker.

In the case of a foster child, you may not have much notice, but you will likely know ahead of time the approximate ages of the kids you are usually placed with. Based on that, you can always keep a bit of a stash of small gifts such as stuffed animals, colouring books and crayons, a book, some toiletries, a flashlight or nightlight in case they are afraid of the dark, and a few snacks. Having these items on hand will allow you to make a welcome basket when you need it.

### Bedtime

Sleeping in another person's home can be frightening for a child of any age. Do your best to make bedtime as comfortable as possible. Offer stuffed animals, to leave lights on, to read multiple stories or stay in the room until your child is asleep. Consider allowing older children the freedom to choose when they go to sleep. They can read, listen to music, color/doodle, do a puzzle or play with a fidget (have a couple on hand just in case) in their room until they are ready to sleep.

Prepare yourself for a long night and put yourself in your child's shoes over and over again to keep perspective. The first night only happens once and it has the potential to be a healthy seed for a blossoming relationship.

Source: <https://adoption.com/what-to-do-the-first-day-with-a-new-foster-child>



## IDEAS DURING A PANDEMIC

**D**uring the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is experiencing anxiety, stress, confusion, pressure and ongoing trauma. COVID-19 is not just a challenge to our physical health but it continues to test our mental health. Taking care of yourself may relieve the pressures of everyday life and resets your mind and body. Having a self-care routine has also been clinically proven to reduce anxiety and depression, prevent chronic stress, improve concentration, minimize frustration and anger, boost happiness, and improve energy levels. Self-care has also been clinically proven to reduce heart disease, stroke and cancer.

Remember that self-care looks different for everyone. Find your own rhythm and routine, and make it a daily habit.

1. Think of something you've dreaded doing and complete it. Then, cross it off your list
2. Practice deep breathing
3. Ask for help
4. Adapt your routine
5. Join/host a virtual party
6. Practice self compassion
7. Stretch your tired muscles
8. Get a good night sleep
9. Listen to a podcast on a subject that interests you
10. Call someone you haven't talked to in a while and enjoy catching up
11. Take a break from technology
12. Pull out a cookbook or go online for a recipe you've never made - whether it's an awesome salad or delectable new entrée
13. Get rid of five things you never use
14. Do something you've been putting off
15. De-clutter the house
16. Complete a 1,000-piece puzzle
17. Make lifestyle and dietary changes
18. Take a much needed break
19. Keep things in perspective
20. Set boundaries with family members
21. Find ways to laugh
22. Take a walk outdoors
23. Appreciated something you rarely have time to notice
24. Play a board game with the family
25. Make a gratitude list

# What I Wish I Had Known Before I Started Foster Parenting

By Lindsay Emswiler



I was completely new to the foster system and what foster parenting meant when I was approved. Here are a few things that I learned quickly!

## **Saying no is just as emotional as saying yes.**

Nothing can prepare you for the first call you receive for placement. I vividly remember the moment my phone rang. On the other line, our homefinder gives me the most mundane scenario you have ever heard.

“Her Mom is about to have a C-Section, and she needs help caring for her daughter this week. There is no other family.”

I was leaving the next day for a long planned vacation. I had to

say no. I cried for two days, not to mention the heavy breathing and the panic attack. Why? She wasn't abused or neglected, her mother just needed help? I was still a wreck!

Since then, I can tell you exactly where I was standing when I have to say no to a placement. Every time I wonder if I am turning down my future child. The “coulda, shoulda, woulda’s” are unbearable, but sometimes the timing is off or the situation isn't feasible for our family. Saying yes is hard, but saying no is harder.

## **The first week is the toughest.**

Getting to know a new member of your family and understanding their individual needs can make the first week seem like a whirlwind.

Not to mention the doctor appointments, dentists, eye doctor, placement visits, clothing vouchers, agency visits, medical record transfers, WIC appointments; and the list goes on and on.

Make sure to slow down, and take time to realize that bonding with your child is more important than everything that we just mentioned. Learn bonding techniques for infants. Rock your toddler to sleep a few times. Take your teenager for ice cream if you have the chance. Whatever you do, remember that next week will probably not be as demanding as the first week.

## **Foster parenting is truly a community service.**

I remember being deep into my first placement and the thought repeatedly came into my mind, “But what about how I feel?”

There are many emotions and feelings in this walk of life, but keep in mind that our main priority is the child. Some days we may do things that we don't want to do, but we do it because we are serving the children. In serving the children, we are making a difference in the future of our community!



## **If you have a fostering story to share with our readers, please send it in!**

- We accept stories/articles about:
- Personal stories and reflections about being a foster parent
  - Great resources for foster parents that you'd like to share
  - Long term connection with past foster children
  - Challenges you've experienced and creative solutions
  - How your extended family or children have responded to your fostering lifestyle
  - Foster-related book reviews
  - Foster-related movie reviews
  - Foster placements resulting in a family growing through adoption
  - Fostering tips and tricks
  - Notable foster related experiences

**Please submit your articles by email to: [kendra@sffa.sk.ca](mailto:kendra@sffa.sk.ca)**



## Celebrate National Child Day and children's rights on November 20<sup>th</sup>

**N**ational Child Day is celebrated in Canada on November 20<sup>th</sup> in recognition of our country's commitment to upholding the rights of children and two historic events: the 1959 signing of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights of children with 54 articles that provide us with a solid road map of what is needed to raise healthy and happy children and youth.

**#RIGHTTOBESAFE**



# The importance of Record Keeping as a Foster Parent

**R**ecord keeping is essential because your family will be spending more time with the foster child than any other party. These entries and observations are integral to future planning and for the child's memories.

### How should I record information?

- A journal of precise notes in point form is acceptable.
- Be sure to write down the dates and times.
- Use a separate journal or notebook for each child and ensure that it remains confidential.
- Describe any incidents as accurately and thoroughly as possible.

### What should I record?

- Visits with the natural family;
- School progress or school related issues;
- All health appointments, immunizations, medications, health care issues or injuries;
- Unusual behaviours or change in behaviour of the child;
- Achievements or successes of the child;
- Changes in the child's circumstance;
- Cultural activities that the child may have participated in; and
- Any incidents that you feel may be important.

### Why should I keep these records?

- A diary of these events can help you to remember later.
- They may assist with decision making and future planning.
- They can be used to supply information in court or during case planning.
- Recording the child's behaviour (both negative and positive) can identify a behaviour pattern.
- There will be a written record of events in the case of something that may be later disputed.
- A recording of incidents can help you to obtain additional help or supports if necessary.
- Having detailed records can reduce your family's risk of having a complaint or allegation made against you, especially if a complaint is made a long time after the event.

Keeping valuable mementos such as photos, awards, health information, immunization records, awards, report cards and school projects ensures that people, places and memories that are important to the child are not forgotten.



# Helping Kids When They Worry

**A**t the start of any school year, kids feel a mix of emotions. It's natural to feel excited about what's ahead – and to worry about whether they are ready to handle it.

This year, kids and teens may be more excited than ever to be back with their friends and teachers. But some may worry more than usual, too. It's natural for worry to surge when there's been so much change, uncertainty, and hardship.

Here's how parents can help:

- **Ask what's on their minds.** Help kids label what they think and feel. They might not always have a lot to say. But let them know you're open to listening and talking any time.
- **Spend time with them.** Do this every day, even if it's just a few minutes. Do things together that you both enjoy. Go for a walk, cook, eat, play – or just hang out. Find ways to smile and laugh together. This keeps the bond between you strong and positive. And it allows kids and teens to open up naturally.
- **Listen with patience.** When kids and teens want to talk, listen with your full attention. Give them time to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Ask questions to hear more. Don't be too quick to give advice. Let them confide. Listen calmly to what they have to say.



**Invite kids and teens to think of what they can do.”**

- **Show you understand.** Let your child know that what's on their mind makes sense to you. Don't dismiss worries by saying, "There's nothing to worry about." This can make kids think they shouldn't feel the way they do. When you accept how they feel, it's easier for kids to cope and think of what to do.
- **Help kids think about how to handle things.** Don't jump in to solve problems for them. Instead, invite kids and teens to think of what they can do. Talk it through together. Talk about how well things can turn out. Be willing to help as needed.
- **Encourage.** Follow up to find out how things are going. Praise your child's effort and notice their progress. Show you're proud. Encourage kids and teens to keep practicing

the things they're working on. Remind them that practice helps them get better at things.

- **Help kids expect good things.** Don't dwell on what worries your child. Talk about the good things, too. Ask them what they look forward to. Ask about the good things that happen in their day. Tell them about the good things in your day, too. Give more attention to good things than you give to problems and worries. Let worry take a back seat.
- **Soothe and comfort.** At times, kids and teens may feel overwhelmed by worry or another strong emotion. In those moments, trying to talk it through isn't likely to help. It might help more to comfort your child, to help them feel safe and calm. Remind kids that you're there protect them, and to help them through things that happen. Teach them to use calm breathing to settle themselves when they are upset.

If your child needs extra support with worries at school, talk with their teacher, counselor, or principal. Find out how they can help. If your child has anxiety that seems too hard for them to handle alone, talk with your child's doctor or a mental health doctor.

Source: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/worrying.html>

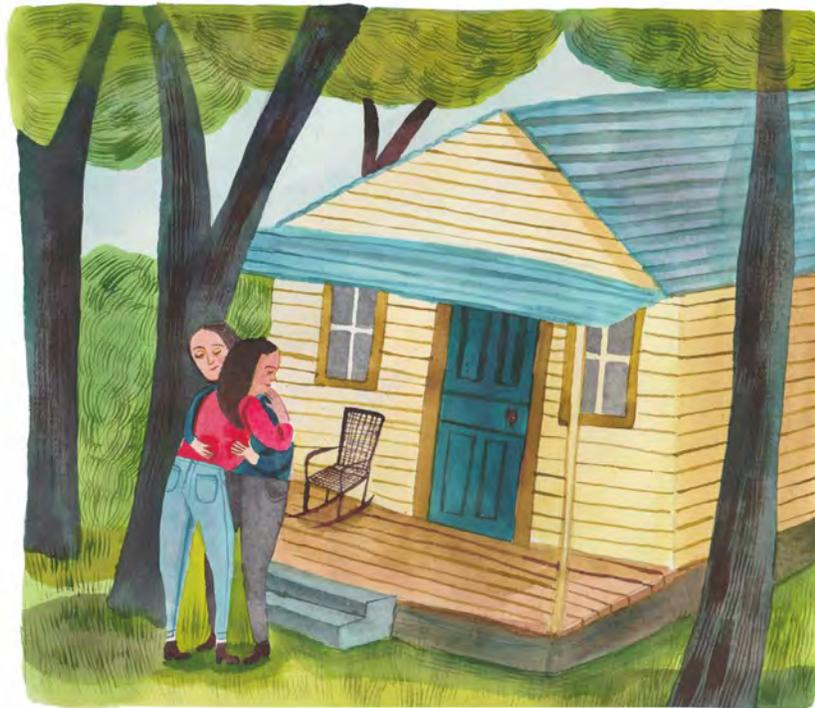


## Let's stay connected..

We are now sending out e-mails to our foster parents. To be added to our contact list and receive the latest news, please send your e-mail address to [kendra@sffa.sk.ca](mailto:kendra@sffa.sk.ca)

# A Foster Child of the Opioid Epidemic

by Lisa Marie Basile



I sat on a wrought iron daybed facing an open window, and a warm breeze was pooling in. It was the first day in my second foster home. The room was made up to seem welcoming, but its pleasantness somehow felt oppressive. I felt dirty, worthless and consumed by fear.

I was about to start 10th grade for the second time, since I'd failed the year before. Earlier that morning, I said goodbye to my 10-year-old brother, helped him into a car, and watched him ride away to live with another foster family.

"Go ahead and hang up your clothes," my new foster mother said. Sternness was her way of normalizing an abnormal situation. I was abnormal. I came from abnormal. None of my clothes were really *hang-up-able*. I felt I had to apologize for my clothes, for my parents, for myself.

Both of my parents had used drugs — opioids — since my childhood. I'm 8: My mother locks my screaming, doped-up father out. I'm crying on the other side of a door as she commands me not to open it. I'm 12: This time I'm banging on a door as my mother locks herself into a public bathroom to get high. Those memories stay sharp. It wasn't always like this, though. We once lived in a sunny apartment in New Jersey; my mom braided my hair, kissed me a hundred times, comforted me when I was sad or sick.

My father, an accomplished blues guitarist, let me stay up late and watch horror movies with him. He let my creativity blossom.

My father struggled with addiction first — he went to rehab and to prison and, for the most part, exited our lives. My mother's addiction came later, in my early teens. With limited

resources, my parents didn't have the option to quit their jobs and check themselves into long-term rehab. Addiction poisoned everything.

“

Earlier that morning, I said goodbye to my 10-year-old brother, helped him into a car, and watched him ride away to live with another foster family.”

In eighth grade, I spent Christmas in a 10x10 room in a homeless shelter with my mother, brother and a bunk bed. We were spoiled with donated gifts. I'd gotten a Tamagotchi — a small digital “pet” I could care for. I'd feed it and clean it and watch it grow, and, despite it being childish, having that responsibility brought me a sense of stability. My mother wept as we opened the presents. She gave us a few things, too: She wrapped socks in sparkly ribbons and gave me a lacy green shirt that I wore to shreds.

The next morning, we walked with our mother to a nearby methadone clinic. My brother carried his favorite gift: a small blue train with silver wheels.

Eventually, the state took us away. My mother just couldn't get better or take care of us properly, they believed.

The couple who became my foster parents for my high school years gave me a good home and access to an

incredible school system, but I still would rather have been with my mother. Unlike my foster parents, she understood me on a deep level. There was no way my foster parents could truly know me, I thought. I kept them at a distance; we were just different.

In school, I crafted an image of “happy,” repressing the heaviness that hung on me. My teachers treated me with a softness and patience that I needed, but they also pushed me hard; they wanted me to go to college, to transcend my life.

I purposely didn’t make friends in my new high school. I didn’t want anyone to know where my house was or why I lived with strangers. Some of them found out, I think, and they wrote me off as a freak. I felt invisible, but I didn’t try to fight it.

I wish I’d had relatives to live with or at least communicate with at the time but my grandmother was in Virginia, and she was dying. The stigma of addiction kept other relatives at bay. Years later, only one of them apologized.

I missed the way my mother would blast Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd while cleaning the house. She loved watching design TV shows and making plans for her dream home.

Despite her struggle, she was kind and hopeful and light — and I needed that light. I missed my brother, too. Even though he was younger than me, we were similar; we made the same jokes, we thought in similar ways, and we’d been through the same pain.

Still, I was one of the lucky ones. My parents didn’t die from an

overdose and I wasn’t abused or neglected by my foster parents — unlike so many other foster kids. If I was lucky, then what does that mean for the others?

By the time I finished high school, my mother had gotten clean. She’d maintained sobriety, gotten a job and rented a small, lopsided house in the woods of rural New Jersey. It was the most beautiful house I could imagine, despite its old walls and slanted roof and barely working furnace.

“**Strangers had an audacious compassion for my mother and father, and my foster parents and schoolteachers had an unwavering compassion for me. I carry that compassion with me each day...**”

The first time she hugged me, I stayed close in her arms, listening to the sounds of birds outside.

I stayed with her briefly before starting college in the following weeks. It was painful saying goodbye yet again, but this time, I knew where she was and I could go back. I had a chance to get beyond all of this, and I wanted to take it.

My mom decorated the house in whites and tans. She bought cheap things but made them look stunning. You could sense her self-care in every chair, every carpet, every curtain.

At night in the summer, she’d make salad with cucumbers from the farmers’ market and

we’d watch the fireflies. Then, we’d sit and drink coffee on our deck while a thousand cicadas sang. Coming home to see her was a quiet healing; every time I came back to that house, I was less sad, less lost.

She’s since moved, but that place in the woods remains a powerful symbol of rebirth.

And while it took years for me to speak with my father again, I do now. He’s still a musician, he fishes in a green boat, and he lives a simple life. I can sense their shame and regret; when it comes up, that much is clear, but we don’t talk about it often. They both agreed that I could write about our experience; they say it’s my story and I may tell it.

Addiction is an indiscriminate disease. You want to blame the weakness inside a person. But like a tree, it extends its gnarled branches in many directions: toward the children it hurts, toward the state it burdens and toward the victims it consumes.

There is a space inside me that is still filled with shame, embarrassment, fear, anger, resentment and — as I get older — a need to tell this truth, to get this ugliness out of me.

In the end, though — and as I grow older — I hold to one thing: compassion. Strangers had an audacious compassion for my mother and father, and my foster parents and schoolteachers had an unwavering compassion for me. I carry that compassion with me each day — it is as vital to me as blood and air, and it colors my entire life.

*Lisa Marie Basile is a poet living in New York City. She founded and runs Luna Luna Magazine.*



## Legal Services Expenditures

### Legal Documents:

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The department shall pay actual fees for the following legal documents:

- birth, marriage and death certificates when required for court purposes or to complete the children's services file
- required certificates for adoption applicants who are receiving financial assistance;
- passports for children in care
- court transcripts

If the child is a temporary ward an application for a passport can only be made after consultation with the parent. The parent and the Regional Director should sign the passport application.

### Some Practice Guidelines:

Youth 16 years of age or older complete their own passport applications.

The caseworker completes the application for children under 16 years.

- follow instructions closely omitting the names of the parents
- state the child is a ward of the Minister of Social Services
- the application should be signed by the caseworker, and by the caseworker's supervisor, as guarantor.

Passport pictures of the child must be obtained. The necessary fee for the passport must be enclosed with the application.

## Caregiving Support for difficult times

### When Should I Call for Support?

Being a foster parent is not easy, but it is rewarding. It is important to know that you have support when you are struggling. If you have questions about policy, case planning or need support with investigations or quality of care, know that you are not alone. There are many different people who can support you and answer any questions that you may have, such as the SFFA advocate.

It seems like almost everywhere you turn the focus is on COVID19. You are not alone as families attempt to navigate all the information about COVID-19 and try to plan for the unknown. Information keeps changing and it is hard to keep up. The world around us can feel scary for adults and children. It is important to reach out if you are struggling and be aware of how the children/youth in your home are coping.

If you need support that is more urgent after business hours call Mobile Crisis:

- **La Ronge:** 24-Hour Crisis Line 306-425-4090
- **Prince Albert:** Mobile Crisis 306-764-1011
- **Regina:** Mobile Crisis Services 306-757-0127
- **Saskatoon:** Mobile Crisis Service 306-933-6200
- **Southwest:** Crisis Services 1-800-567-3334

### Other resources (online):

**Caring for Kids:** A website designed by Canadian paediatricians to provide caregivers with information about their child's health and well-being.

<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/>

### How to Talk to Kids About the Coronavirus

<https://youtu.be/WhVad8ToCiU>



# Creating a Welcome Book



**A** Welcome Book is a scrapbook you present to your child to help introduce them to your family. They can be presented to a child once they have been placed in your home. A typical Welcome Book is 5-9 pages, and contains photos with brief descriptions. For an older child/teenager, you can include more pages. Suggestions for what to include in your Welcome Book are as follows:

- A family photo featuring the parent(s), and brothers and sisters
- A photo of the pets in the home
- A photo of the outside of the house
- A photo of the child's room, and any other rooms with significance (where you watch TV, play room, kitchen, backyard, etc.)
- A photo of their new school
- A photo of a local park, or your family participating in a favorite weekend activity



## Other suggestions:

- Be cautious when including pictures of extended family and close friends. You don't want to overwhelm the child with a bunch of new people. The main focus should be on the people living in your home.
- When possible, use action shots of people. For example, if your family loves to cook you could have a picture of you and your child(ren) baking cookies in your kitchen. Not only does this allow the child to envision what life is like in your home, but it also makes your family seem more welcoming versus looking at a picture of an empty room.
- For younger children, use less pages and words.
- If you have some information on what types of activities or hobbies your child enjoys, include pictures of those as well. For example, if your child loves to play soccer include a picture of a nearby soccer field where they can play. Or if they love to go skateboarding, show a picture of the local skate park.

It's important to keep the information and photos in the Welcome Book as "real" as possible. Your Welcome Book should show your child what daily life is like in your home. Familiarity reduces fear, so include photos and information about what a child will be experiencing/seeing on a regular basis. Any new child coming into your home would benefit from a Welcome Book. It will still be a big change for them, and having a Welcome Book to look through will not only make them feel more comfortable, it will also make them feel they are part of your family.

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## Requisitions available for Goods and Services Vouchers

Foster families may receive requisition forms (vouchers) for immediate purchases children or youth need when coming into or while in their care. Required items may include clothing, diapers, formula, car seats or other special needs requests that are approved by the child's Caseworker.

### Things to remember when using a Requisition (voucher):

- Must have photo identification to match the name on the requisition otherwise it will not be accepted
- The amount purchased (including tax) must not exceed the amount indicated on the requisition
- Purchases are not subject to the Goods and Services Tax (GST)
- The requisition is not valid for payment after six months from date of issue
- Refunds covering the cost of a returned item must be made to the Ministry of Social Services
- No cash back will be given to the purchaser

For a list of Community Retailers accepting requisition vouchers visit the following online link:

<https://www.saskfosterfamilies.ca/resources-for-foster-parents/goods-and-services-vouchers>

# audiobooks



## SCOOT OVER AND MAKE SOME ROOM

Creating a Space Where Everyone Belongs

Written by: Heather Avis

Narrated by: Heather Avis

Unabridged Audiobook

Release: 06/25/2019

Runtime: 5.60 Hours

ISBN: 9781978678316

Audience: Adult

Publisher: Zondervan on Brilliance Audio

Language: English

Author and Instagram star Heather Avis has made it her mission to introduce the world to the unique gifts and real-life challenges of those who have been pushed to the edges of society. Mama to three adopted kids - two with Down Syndrome - Heather encourages us all to take a breath, whisper a prayer, laugh a little, and make room for the wildflowers.

In a world of divisions and margins, those who act, look, and grow a little differently are all too often shoved aside. *Scoot Over and Make Some Room* is part inspiring narrative and part encouraging challenge for us all to listen and learn from those we're prone to ignore.

Heather tells hilarious stories of her growing kids, spontaneous dance parties, forgotten pants, and navigating the challenges and joys of parenthood. She shares heartbreaking moments when her kids were denied a place at the table and when she had to fight for their voices to be heard. With beautiful wisdom and profound convictions, this manifesto will empower you to notice who's missing in the spaces you live in, to make room for your own kids and for those others who need you and your open heart.

### **PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 41271051**

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

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