

Advisor

MEET SFFA'S NEWEST
ADVOCATE

LEADERSHIP
COMMITTEE EVENTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF
SELF CARE

MAKING FRIENDS
WITH OTHER FOSTER
PARENTS

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LEVELS OF PAY

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HARD, YOU'RE
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CHILD REACHES OUT
TO OTHERS

KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

HELP YOUR FOSTER
KIDS BE THEMSELVES
& FIT IN

HOW FOSTER
PARENTS GRIEVE



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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Message from the Executive Director

As I reflect on all that was accomplished in 2019, I look forward to continuing our work in supporting foster parents in their role and strengthening the Foster Care Program in Saskatchewan and across the country. I would like to welcome all new families who have completed their PRIDE pre-service training and are now approved foster parents and thank all who have moved on or retired from their role as foster parents.



This year has been one of growth and accomplishment for us as an organization. I am grateful to the Ministry of Social Services for their support and commitment to improving payments for foster parents with the announcement of the Levels of Pay in the Spring of 2019. This initiative provides additional training to strengthen foster parents' knowledge of Trauma in the children they are caring for and how to effectively deal with these behaviours. The new levels of pay also reduces administrative work for Ministry Staff with the removal of Fee for Service assessments and Skill Fee. In providing additional monies to parents who complete the mandatory trainings as outlined in policy, it provides both greater financial stability and recognizes foster parents' commitment and participation in trainings that better equip them in their role.

In December of 2019 we celebrated the Grand Opening of our new office at 231 Robin Crescent. Our new larger space provides greater access to parking and most significantly, room for two training centers for foster families that our former downtown location did not offer. Online training has become an excellent support for foster parents to ensure timely access and availability to complete training that supports the vulnerable children whom they care for.

As well, during our Grand Opening Celebration we expressed our gratitude to the SaskTel Pioneers for their support and donation of video conferencing equipment for our newly expanded space. Our training room was officially dedicated to the SaskTel Pioneers and has been named the SaskTel Training Room.

Plans are also well under way for this year's Provincial Annual General Meeting, Pre-Conference Training and Conference being held on June 11-14, 2020 in Saskatoon. We are pleased to welcome back presenters from *Back to Back* to further educate foster parents and caregivers on how to deal with and better understand the effects of Trauma in children. Our Conference will focus on Self-Care and include our much anticipated SFFA Conference Kick-Off Evening on Friday Night. Please stay tuned for more information and registration details to come in March.

“

Our new larger space provides greater access to parking and most significantly, room for two training centers for foster families.”

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Provincial Board of Directors for their support, to all staff of the SFFA who work tirelessly to support foster families in their role from within the office or as direct support in their homes and with most appreciation to our Foster Parents. You are why we as an association are passionate about what we do and will continue to advocate for supports and services to strengthen our foster care program.



SEND US YOUR EMAIL

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

Meet the SFFA's New Advocate

We would like to introduce Jordan Paulsen our new advocate with Saskatchewan Foster Families Association. Jordan graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with a Bachelor of Arts and Science majoring in Health Studies. He comes to the SFFA with ample experience working with families of Saskatchewan, having previously worked with the Ronald McDonald House Charities Saskatchewan.

In his spare time Jordan enjoys spending time with his family and friends, and his dog Diesel. He enjoys travelling the world and hopes to visit every continent one day. Jordan hopes to one day complete chiropractic school and provide hands on help to his peers.

Jordan looks forward to hearing from any Foster Parent in need of support, or simply wanting to chat.



Leadership Committee Events

Leadership Committees bring foster parents together in social settings to network with other foster families in their communities. Throughout November and December we celebrated the holiday season in the following locations:

- Regina** - Saskatchewan Science Centre
- Yorkton** - Dreamland
- Swift Current** - Frontier Bowling Lanes
- Saskatoon** - Nutrien Wonderhub
- Prince Albert** - CJ's Climb & Play
- Moose Jaw** - Yara Centre



If you have any suggestions or ideas of events to be held in your community please call Jordan at (306) 975-1591.

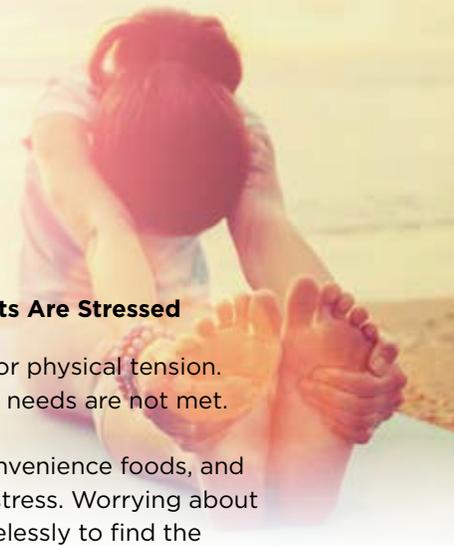
Save the date

**SFFA Biennial Conference
June 11-13, 2020.**

Watch for further details on our website
www.saskfosterfamilies.ca
and in the next *Advisor* edition.



The Importance of *Self Care* for Foster and Adoptive Parents



When we get busy, self-care is the first thing to go. This is especially true when our children's needs seem greater. Kids from hard places go through developmental phases, anniversaries of trauma, or other stressful times that trigger challenges and increase needs.

Why Parents Don't Prioritize Self-Care

As parents, we set ourselves aside to stick close to our little ones and help them feel safe. We relive trauma with them, get up with them in the night, and hold their hands through the scary moments.

Appointments fill our schedules. If your children are still in foster care, they may have family visits as well as visits with all the professionals involved in their case. Then there's therapy, counseling, and medical appointments.

I haven't even mentioned all we do to give our children normalcy. Extracurricular activities, playdates, youth group, etc.

And this is when things are going well!

When stress in our children's lives increases, so do behavioral symptoms. Then, we slip into what is so poorly labeled, "survival mode."

Any form of self-care that might have been happening before survival mode quickly gets pushed aside.

What Self-Care Is and Is Not

Don't get me wrong, I like a quiet afternoon at the salon followed by a good book in a coffee shop. That's a treat, though.

Self-care is taking care of one's own needs. Meeting needs is the only way to complete a healthy stress cycle so that it does not become toxic. As adults, we self-regulate by meeting our needs or asking someone to help.

We meet our needs by taking care of our bodies, minds, and spirits.

What Happens When Parents Are Stressed

Stress is mental, emotional, or physical tension. We feel distressed when our needs are not met.

Skipping exercise, eating convenience foods, and losing sleep cause physical stress. Worrying about our children and working tirelessly to find the best resources causes mental stress. Experiencing behavioral symptoms and grieving the loss of our hopes and expectations causes emotional stress.

All of these unmet needs cause the release of stress chemicals. The chemicals, in turn, trigger physical and neurological responses designed to keep us safe. Think fight, flight, or freeze.

Cortisol is a stress chemical increased in the coping stage. At normal levels, it gives us energy, maintains blood pressure, controls inflammation, and helps us have a sense of well-being.

When cortisol remains elevated, we experience memory loss, distorted thinking, and loss of impulse control. Physically, prolonged elevation of cortisol causes insomnia, weight gain, allergies, and illness.

The Importance of Self-Care

The things that keep you from self-care are the very reasons you should prioritize it. We cannot meet our children's needs or walk through their challenges if we cannot think clearly or have the necessary energy.

A stressed-out parent cannot calm a stressed-out child.

We have the responsibility as parents to take care of our body, mind, and spirit in order to stay healthy enough to meet the needs of our children.

Source: <http://www.teresasamansfield.com/the-importance-of-self-care-for-foster-and-adoptive-parents/>

Why You Need to Make Friends With Other Foster Parents

Other foster parents should be an essential part of your support network. Here's why.

by Kristy O'Neal

I talk to potential foster parents often who are just about to finish their training hours and dive into their home study. I'm often asked about one thing that I think every foster parent should know, and this is it: You need to make friends with other foster parents. This community should be an essential part of your support network, both physically and emotionally.

There are a lot of different ways to find other foster parents with whom you can connect. Your local agency may host support groups or know where you can find them. You can search for online communities of people via Facebook or similar venues (and sometimes even find families in a special niche, perhaps by your marital status or the age range you foster). If all else fails, you can ask your family's social worker (the person who does your home study and renews your license) to connect you with another foster family to be your mentor. Here are some benefits to doing life with other foster parents:

Sound, experienced advice

Parenting a child who has been exposed to trauma can be very different from parenting a child who has not been exposed to trauma. Promoting safe attachment, learning to identify triggers, deciphering the communication behind the behavior, and even

finding appropriate means of correction and discipline are much more difficult in a child who has been abused or neglected, especially when you have just met them and might know little of their history. You need people you can call who know the difference, who have some of the same training and experience you have had, who simply get it.

“There are a lot of different ways to find other foster parents with whom you can connect.”

A place to vent

And speaking of people who simply get it, you need someone in your life you can call when you're at the end of your rope, who won't feel like it's their job to talk you out of foster care. As a foster parent, we choose to embrace and love children who may not be ours for long. We sign up for that heartache, and it's something that not everyone will understand. Even something we choose to do can be hard, and sometimes you just need a safe place to vent. And between the grief at knowing what our children experience and the frustration of a broken system, there can be a lot of things to vent about.

Connection for yourself and your children

Most kids want to be normal, to not stand out in a negative way from their peers. But for kids in foster care, the complexities that make up daily life (missing school for court hearings, only seeing your mom twice a week at a supervised family visit, living with other children they aren't related to) can be constant reminders of their situation. When we get together with other foster families, though, this is the norm, rather than what makes them different. And for my adopted kids, it reinforces the idea that families are built in lots of different ways.

Shared advocacy

There are a lot of issues at a local, state, and national level that affect foster parents and kids in foster care. Collectively, our voices are louder. Partnering with other foster parents and support groups increases our ability to affect change for our kids and our families. Fellow foster parents, what would you add? What benefits have you experienced by making friends with other foster parents? What are some ways we can support each other?

Source: <https://adoption.com/why-you-need-to-make-friends-with-other-foster-parents>

Child and Family Programs

November 14, 2019

Dear Foster Parents:

Congratulations to those that have completed mandatory caregiver training!

For those foster families that completed the mandatory training by October 31st, 2019 you would have received the Level Two Pay of \$500/month/child on your October maintenance payment.

Other existing foster care payments, including basic maintenance, special needs, respite and expense reimbursements (such as for travel) will remain unchanged.

Three important updates related to the PRIDE Levels of Pay, Phase 1 for those families that have not completed the five mandatory trainings and receiving fee for service and the skill development fee:

- Will receive an extension to April 30, 2020 to complete the mandatory training;
- Will continue to be eligible for your payments until April 30, 2020 for current placements in their Foster home;
- New placements to your Foster home will be eligible for payments of basic maintenance plus Foster Care Exceptional Supplement of \$125 until April 30, 2020.

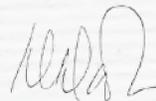
After April 30, 2020 foster families that have not completed their mandatory training will be eligible for Level 1 Pay - Basic Maintenance.

To register and to discuss your mandatory training needs and goals please call your Resource Worker and the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association - Courtenay Whalley 306.975.1019 or by email courtenay@sffa.sk.ca

Thank you,



Owen Manz
Director, Out of Home Care
Ministry of Social Services



Deb Davies
Executive Director
Saskatchewan Foster Families Association

If Foster Care is Hard, You're Probably Doing it Right



by Maralee Bradley

I remember the moment. The four of us were all sitting on the kitchen counters eating cereal at ten p.m. (or it might have been ice-cream... we were young and stressed) debriefing about the events of the day. We were all recent college graduates in our early twenties who were responsible for the day-in and day-out love and nurture of 7 boys, mostly teens and preteens. Boys who had come from trauma. Boys who couldn't safely live with their parents. Boys who brought their unhealthy coping skills and beautiful smiles into this house designed to be their home until they could be safely reunified with their families... which for many of them over the years never happened.

We were exhausted by our work. My husband and I were the houseparents and along with caring for the boys were also responsible for supervising the interns assigned to help us—interns that were our same age with our same level of experience (namely, not much). We worked together to design systems to help these kids and created nurturing rituals and loved them with every ounce of our beings and it was draining. I remember the

moment when one of our interns said, “I don't think it's supposed to be this hard. It shouldn't be this hard.” We saw other houseparents that made it look easier than what we were experiencing. Were we making this more difficult than it had to be? It's a question that has continued to haunt me over the years of caring for kids from trauma and as we continue to advocate for them, their families, and the foster families that partner with them.

I remember answering her in the moment, “I think it IS supposed to be this hard, if you're doing it right.” And that's continued to be the answer that gives me peace.

If you're doing foster care right, it may be the hardest thing you'll ever do. You will witness behaviors that are startling and break your heart as you realize they used to serve a purpose in the life of this child. You'll see physical wounds that are painful just to look at. You'll read court reports that frighten you. You'll spend your days and minutes and hours doing a thousand things to build trust, but the one time you respond in harshness, you're back to square one. You will be

up all night with a child who has nightmares, then be chastised by her mother for not having her dressed in the clothes mom prefers for the visit that day. There are days you will feel like beating your head against the wall and you'll wonder why you ever willingly signed up for this. And that's usually the day someone will make an offhanded comment about how foster parents are all in it for the money and you'll have to do your best not to cry because you KNOW they aren't paying you well enough to make it worth the pain.

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We know the cost of doing foster care well and we validate the pain you're experiencing and promise it isn't in vain.”

If you're looking for some kind of “ministry” opportunity where you can put in a minimum of effort and receive the maximum praise, this isn't the thing for you. If you're not willing to do something hard, don't bother. But if you jump into this world and in those dark moments find yourself asking, “Is it supposed to be this hard?” Just know there are many other foster parents with you, standing beside you, saying “Yes! It is! Because you're doing it right!” We know the cost of doing foster care well and we validate the pain you're experiencing and promise it isn't in vain.

Foster kids need you to be all in for them. They need you to be willing to take on the hard so they can have a chance at healing, at chance at normalcy. Struggling through the pain of foster care is NOT a sign that you're doing it wrong or that you shouldn't be doing it at all. It is a sign you are seeing this child's needs and you are fighting to be sure they are met. And the struggles of foster care aren't the whole story.

Because the challenges are so intense, the pain is so deep, the joy is intense, too. There are moments of stunning beauty- the child who finally comes to you when they're scared instead of hiding, the teenager who tells you how they'd protect you from any harm, the baby that learns to calm when you sing to them, the little girl who proudly brings you her school project, the little boy who shyly hands you a bouquet of dandelions. Reunifications with a mother who worked so hard. Adoptions by families who loved their children from the start.

In foster care you learn to not just seek joy in the happy endings, because they are the exceptions rather than the rule. You learn to find joy in the process. You seize these fleeting moments of peace because you know what a gift they are. You become a different person than you ever thought you could be as your heart stretches to love not just the helpless child in front of you, but the family that gave him life and is struggling to reclaim their own. Even the brokenness of “the system” and the frustrations of the foster care process become opportunities to find your voice as an advocate and fight for this child and the many other children stuck in legal limbo as wards of the state.



Could foster care be easier? Sure. If we weren't so invested. If we didn't love so hard, fight so strongly, feel so deeply. If we WERE just collecting a monthly reimbursement and walling ourselves off from these kids and their struggles. There is a way to do foster care more easily, but that involves these kids being denied a real chance at normalcy, stability and love. I know those kinds of foster homes exist and it breaks my heart. Easy isn't my goal.

Even in the very hardest of days, foster care is the right thing to do. It isn't right because the results go the way we want or we always feel appreciated and loved for our sacrifices or because this child and their family become functioning and healthy. Foster care is often hard because this work is messy and getting involved means you're going to get messy, too. But that's exactly how it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be this hard. And we're supposed to keep at it because these kids are worth it.

Maralee is a mom of six kids ages 8 and under. Four were adopted and two were biological surprises. Prior to becoming parents, Maralee and her husband were houseparents at a children's home and had the privilege of helping to raise 17 boys during their five year tenure.

A former foster child, now he reaches out to help others

Submitted by Parry Stelter

My name is Parry Stelter and I am originally from Alexander First Nation. I was a foster child during what is called the “Sixties Scoop” generation of Indigenous people in Canada. I was brought to live with the Stelter’s in a caring non-Indigenous home in Edmonton, Alberta. I always knew I was a foster child, but I never met my biological family until I was 18. My biological family name is Newborn, but because I spent all my childhood and teenage years with the Stelter’s I took on their name when I was a teenager.

At this time, I met many family members. This was an exciting time, but I also went through a huge identity crisis. There were many strange cultural differences, but despite those differences I ended up living in Alexander First Nation and Enoch Cree Nation for a few years. I was estranged from my foster family at the time, because I was going through a rebellious stage and so meeting this new family was an excellent choice as opposed to being homeless. Which was probably where I was headed, because I was a binge alcoholic by the age of 16.

After realizing that being a high school drop out and binge alcoholic was not getting me anywhere, I went to a treatment centre and tried to sober up. Although the attempted sobriety at the treatment center didn’t last long, I still decided to go back to school and finish my grade 12. This led to a road of life long learning.



To make a long story short, the good news is that I ended up getting my grade 12, and over the course of 30 years ended up getting a college diploma, a university bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, and now I am a doctoral candidate working on my project dissertation. I have also been sober 19 years now.

The journey to get to where I am now was tough, filled with sadness and struggle. I ended up going to about six treatment centers trying to turn my life around and ended up in trouble with the law. I never ended up in prison, but I still got in enough trouble to get a criminal record. This was a humiliating process, since in my early years in getting post-secondary education, I wanted to work in prisons as a caseworker and work my way up to upper management. Yet, now I am on the verge of getting a Pardon from the federal government for which I have already given all the paper work. I did this so that certain job opportunities could open up for me again.

Another humiliating experience is when I lost my own children to child welfare. I didn’t sober up until I lost my children and although I sobered up shortly after losing them, it took years to get them back. Eventually I got all my children back and learning to be an active father again was a challenge. Now that I have been sober for 19 years, I am coming full circle by taking care of other extended family members. My sister-in-law passed away a few years ago and when that happened, I took my niece, who was 14 at the time, in to live with us full time. She is now part our family at home.

After going through all that post-secondary education and turning my life around I now do work with my own Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, working towards healing and reconciliation and reaching our full potential. Much of my work is in the Christian community, but I also

do work that is for the general community at large.

Some of the workshops I do are: 1 - *Understanding Indigenous People More*, which focuses on understanding the behind the scenes challenges that Indigenous people have faced throughout the history of Canada and still face. Many Indigenous people are still incredibly angry and upset over many relevant issues, but at the same time many non-Indigenous people wonder why Indigenous people are still talking about Residential Schools and other atrocities. This information workshop creates a better understanding of these issues.

Another workshop is: 2 - *Dealing with Grief, Loss, and Intergenerational Trauma*. Many Indigenous people don't understand their own sense of grief and loss and trauma and many non-Indigenous people don't realize how deep these scars go throughout the generations. From the great grandparents to the grandparents to the parents to the children to the grandchildren and to the great grandchildren. Eight generations went through residential Schools and so it will take some time to heal and understand this grief. This workshop helps Indigenous people understand this entire process and that it is in fact happening with them whether they realize it or not. And not understanding it creates a vicious cycle of self abuse and other forms of abuse towards family members and society.

Many Indigenous people experience an identity crisis and many Indigenous children will reach out to their biological families when they are of age or

sooner. This should not surprise anyone, because no matter how they were treated in their biological families, that could take care of them, they will always feel a connection to them. All a foster family can do is live by example and be as supportive as they can, knowing that if a child comes into their life for a short amount of time that the foster family can still make a difference during a troubling time.

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All a foster family can do is live by example and be as supportive as they can, knowing that if a child comes into their life for a short amount of time, that the foster family can still make a difference during a troubling time.”

Out of all my foster parents, my adopted mother Jean Stelter who passed away when I was 12, was the most special to me. She battled with cancer for six years before she passed away, but she accepted me, as well as the rest of the family, as one of their own. I never felt left out or as an extra addition to the family. Jean Stelter used to pray for me all the time and said to me one day, “because of all the special questions you ask me all the time I can tell God has a special plan for your life.” It was special moments like that which gave me hope, as I was going through some rough times later in life.

I felt really close to my biological family when I first meet them, but as time went by, I realized



that there were so many differences, because of the separation, and to this day it's hard for me to feel really connected with them now. I seemed to have gone through phases of how connected I felt to them. Yet through it all, my roots with the Stelters, who took me in and made me one of their own, still exists to this day. Although my foster dad and mom and one of my brothers have passed away, I am still in regular contact with my other sister and brother in the Stelter family who are older than me.

There are many other aspects of the work that I do that can't be described fully at this time, but if you are interested in learning more about my work or having me do a workshop in your own context, you can visit my website at:

wordofhopeministries.ca

or email me at:

parry@wordofhopeministries.ca

Parry Stelter is a Doctoral Candidate in Contextual Leadership (Providence University).





SHAZAM!

The superhero film revolutionizing how we see foster care

by Madeleine Deliee

I became a foster parent thinking I knew everything about what I was getting into. Foster family experience? Check — my sister was adopted from foster care. Child-rearing experience? Check — two bio kids, plus years as a high school teacher of classroom interaction with my students. On top of that, I had hours of training and a gigantic binder provided by the placement organization. But what I didn't know could have filled volumes, and watching the new film "Shazam!" recently brought all of that back.

In the movie, Billy Batson, the soon-to-be superhero, is also a foster kid. His latest placement is a group home that his roommate/sidekick Freddy Freeman warns him "gets pretty 'Game of Thrones' " — before admitting that it's not really bad. In fact, the place looks warm and welcoming, if a bit worn around the edges — like the house in "It's a Wonderful Life." You almost expect the final to come off the staircase post in Billy's hand.

Say "foster care" to most people and they think of two tropes: the saint or the villain. When we became foster parents, others blessed my husband and I so many times for our heroic generosity, we started to wonder how we were getting mixed up

with Mother Teresa. Conversely, the typical image in literature and entertainment is the parent with no intention of parenting — negligent at best, abusive at worst, and often depicted as "in it for the money." The unloving woman who housed Anne Shirley and made her care for multiple sets of twins before she wound up at Green Gables; the people who locked Temperance Brennan (played by Emily Deschanel on "Bones") in a chest for breaking a dish -- these are examples of the long-standing mainstays.

Despite the occasional glimmer of light in recent offerings such as "The Fosters" and last year's "Instant Family," I've come to expect this equally unfair duality in most representations of foster families. Therefore, I was unprepared for the portrayal of fostering in "Shazam!"

Watching the movie, I realized I was holding my breath, waiting to see whether this would be the sinner or saint version of foster parenting. Much to my relief, it was neither. Instead, the struggles of fostering were not only portrayed accurately, but they were also depicted with compassion.

"Shazam!" was the closest version of fostering I've seen to the reality my family

experienced. The conflicting loyalties between a child's old life and new life, the desire to connect and separate simultaneously, the confusion of not knowing how this arrangement changes your identity — it was all there, just as we lived it.



It would have helped me tremendously to see this before we became a foster family. I grew up with my sister, but before becoming a foster parent, I didn't think about the difference between being someone's sibling and being their mother. I also didn't consider that everyone has a unique story. Why would this child be an exception? But I didn't grasp that this child, in joining our family life, would have a past and a perspective that might not bear any resemblance to ours, or even to my sister's.

As the movie's audience, we see the rituals and routines of the house through Billy's cynical eyes, such as the pre-dinner "hands in," but we also see the hopefulness and uncertainty of his now-foster sister who's about to head to college (and age out of the system), the disengagement and self-protection of the foster brother who's there in body only, and the open-armed plea for affection of the younger foster sister, who wants the security of togetherness. Our own family experienced these conflicting emotions as well.

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Watching the movie, I realized I was holding my breath, waiting to see whether this would be the sinner or saint version of foster parenting.”

Both Victor and Rosa, the film's foster parents, are veterans of the system themselves. Now managing a group home of six kids, Victor at one point reminds Rosa that connection is difficult and far from certain, that they both ran away when they were in care and that it's to be expected.

He reminds her that, in the past, she reacted to a kid running away by saying, "It's not a home till you call it home, it's something you choose." He tells her, "All we can do is give them a place full of love. Whether they choose to call it home, that's up to them." I heard that, and I thought, "Of course." Sometimes, as with my sister, there is a choice to call it home and family. Sometimes, it doesn't turn out that way -- but that

doesn't mean the place was any less necessary.

Our own foster situation was, like many, complicated: the child's history, biological family, former residence -- all of it came into play in ways we'd never considered. The placement lasted almost two years, and when it ended, our biological kids asked if we would please wait before doing it again. My



husband and I respected that — and the toll it took to take someone in and say goodbye. We expect that, at some point, we will foster again, probably when one of our students needs a safe place to stay.

Foster parents are not celestial, but they're also not generally satanic. The families we encountered in our training, in the organization-sponsored meet-and-greets, and in random community interactions were mostly doing their best to provide a safe and loving home. Are there bad apples? Sadly, yes. But using that image to define and exemplify perpetuates a fearful and toxic image of what it means to foster. It's important to move past the mistaken beliefs that prevent greater

involvement. People think they can't foster because they're not old enough or they're too old, or because they don't have a college degree, or because they don't own a house, or because they've never had biological kids. The truth is, most states are desperate for people who just want to share a positive, nurturing home with kids who direly need one.

As of 2017, there were more than 440,000 children in the American foster care system. Are they all adorable moppets straight out of a Broadway musical? No. But they're not broken, violent miscreants either, no matter what horror movies might lead you to believe. Just as foster parents are not generally heaven-sent or evil incarnate, foster kids are also humanly imperfect. Yes, real life is always going to be more complicated than a movie. But "Shazam!" is a great reminder that you don't have to be a superhero to be a foster parent.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/12/opinions/shazam-superhero-shows-foster-care-reality-deliee/index.html>

How to include your **KIDS IN THE KITCHEN...** without losing your mind

There are a few things that will save your sanity when you choose to involve your little ones in meal and snack preparation.

Did you know that getting kids involved in the kitchen, with planning and prepping meals and snacks will boost the likelihood that they will eat more and be more adventurous when it comes to trying new foods? When kids have had a hand in preparing a meal, they are more likely to sit down to family meals and actually eat the foods that they have helped prepare. Helping in the kitchen decreases picky eating tendencies, boosts self-confidence, offers a sense of accomplishment and helps to develop lifelong cooking skills (not to mention healthier eating habits long-term).

The earlier you start including your kids, the quicker they will build skills and confidence in the kitchen (and the quicker

their “help” actually becomes ... helpful!). It also gives parents and kids a chance to bond and spend quality time together.

“**Helping in the kitchen decreases picky eating tendencies, boosts self-confidence, offers a sense of accomplishment and helps to develop lifelong cooking skills.**”

But let’s get real.

It also requires a bit more time, some serious patience and a little more clean-up. But the pay-off is well worth it.

You can include your kids at any stage—meal planning, grocery shopping, prepping and cooking the meal. You can also have them set the table, clear plates and help with clean up too!



1 CHOOSE EASY, DELICIOUS RECIPES THAT DON'T TAKE TOO MUCH TIME:

This is KEY. There’s nothing worse than realizing mid-prep that the recipe you chose is too time-consuming, too complicated or that you don’t have all the

ingredients on hand (especially when you have an impatient toddler who is ready to get cooking!). That's a recipe for frustration, impatience and cranky kids. It's important to choose simple, nutritious, tasty, family-friendly recipes that don't require too much planning, prep or fuss.

2 HAVE A LIST OF AGE-APPROPRIATE TASKS THAT YOUR KIDS CAN DO:

You want to keep your kids busy with fun tasks that make them feel like they're truly helping. To minimize boredom (and keep you sane), have a list of tasks to draw from during the meal prep/cooking process. You want to make sure that the tasks that you're giving your kids are safe, fun and age-appropriate.

Here are some tasks that you can get your kids to help with in the kitchen, by age:



TODDLERS:

- wash fruits and veggies
- peel stickers off fruits and veggies
- dump ingredients into a bowl
- whisk/mix ingredients
- put muffin cups into muffin tins
- tear leafy greens
- hand you utensils such as a wooden spoon
- press the "on" button on the rice cooker
- add toppings to salads, oatmeal, pasta etc.
- wipe tabletops



PRESCHOOL/ KINDERGARTENERS:

- remove eggshells from hard-boiled eggs
- pour from a small pitcher or measuring cup
- husk corn
- make a sandwich or pizza with pre-assembled ingredients
- cut spaghetti or linguini with a plastic knife or kid's scissors
- mash fruits and veggies like sweet potatoes, turnips, carrots or bananas
- peel oranges
- assemble a colourful fruit salad (with fruit that is bite-sized or pre-cut)
- pick fruits and veggies from garden, and then rinse them
- spread peanut butter on toast and add toppings
- help to menu planning
- set the table, serve and clear



3 BE SAFE:

Although getting your kids into the kitchen for meal and snack prep is fun, sparks creativity and builds confidence, it can also be dangerous if you're not careful (think sharp knives, raw meat, hot stove, and buzzing appliances).

Make sure to practice food safety (especially when it comes to hand washing and handling raw meat), and protect your kids from heat and boiling liquids, and be extra careful when handling sharp knives and utensils.

Getting your kids to help in the kitchen not only nurtures their relationship with food, but also builds self-confidence, teaches important life skills, and allows for special family time. With a bit of patience, an open mind and a sense of humour, your kids can become fantastic sous-chefs and kitchen helpers in no time!

Source: <https://www.sarahremmer.com/top-tips-for-including-kids-in-the-kitchen/>

SCHOOL-AGED:

- assemble foods such as a yogurt parfait, smoothie, or salad
- measure ingredients
- beat an egg
- stir ingredients together (like muffins, pancakes, sauces)
- pour muffin batter into muffin cups



- slice soft-cooked vegetables, soft fruit, cheese or tofu with a plastic knife (or real knife if you're supervising)
- spiralize veggies
- set the table on their own
- pour water or milk
- use simple kitchen equipment (ie. grater, toaster, blender or can opener) after you show them how to do so safely
- assemble a salad by combining all of the ingredients and tossing it with salad dressing
- flip pancakes or French toast (with your supervision)

Simple paperclip bookmarks

Now, this is another way to make an easy yet aesthetically pleasing bookmark. That too, with just two materials – ribbons and colorful paper clips. Just take a small piece of ribbon and tie it around one end of the paperclip and you are good to go.



Easy tassel bookmark

Give the usual rectangular patterned bookmark a peppy look by just adding a tassel to it. Just take a piece of paper and cut it out into a basic rectangular bookmark. You can even use patterned cardstock or magazine cut outs for the same. Punch a hole on one side of this bookmark, and attach it to a tassel which is made with yarn.



5 Cool Homemade Bookmark Designs

Paper made heart shaped bookmark

First, take some white paper and cut the heart shape to the desired size. Draw a smaller heart on the patterned paper and cut it out. Now, attach these both together with the help of glue, but only on two sides so that you can use it as a corner bookmark.



Cardboard and paper bookmark

This is a bookmark that is very simple to make. All you have to do is take cardboard and cut it in a basic rectangular bookmark shape. Use a black marker to draw any sketch you want on it. Last but not the least, take a white paper and cut different shapes on it – be it animal, bird, flowers or anything abstract – and glue it onto your cardboard.



Cute cat bookmarks

If you are a cat person, then this bookmark is a must-have for you. All you need is colored paper, some sharpies and a pair of scissors. Cut the colored paper into a rectangle on the three sides, and two triangles on the top resembling cat ears. Now sketch cat with two paws on it. Cut out these paws leaving one side still attached to the bookmark, enabling it to be placed inside the book perfectly. And you are done!

Source: <https://homesthetics.net/diy-bookmarks/>

How to Help Your Foster Kids **BE THEMSELVES & FIT IN**

Being a foster kid is tough. Most foster parents cannot possibly understand what it's like unless they were once foster kids themselves. For these kids, it's like having two families but not really a part of either one. Kids in foster care may feel lost with no identity. They don't really "belong" anywhere. As foster parents, it's your job to help your foster kids learn who they are, and how to be themselves while helping them fit in with your family.

Help Your Foster Kids BE THEMSELVES

Kids in foster care often come with a lot of behavioral issues because of the life they've already lived. They are taught not to do this or that because it's not appropriate. It can be difficult for these kids to know how to act or how to "be themselves" in the right way. Foster parents can help them learn this important skill.

Give your foster children choices as often as possible. Ask them what foods they like, what clothes they like to wear, and what TV shows they like to watch. They may not always make appropriate decisions, so you might want to limit their options to two or three of your choosing. On the other hand, will it really hurt if they wear plaids and stripes to school one day or if they eat macaroni and cheese for breakfast?

You might get the answer "I don't know" when asking for their choices on certain subjects. Some kids are afraid to make their wishes known while others may not have developed a preference. You can use this opportunity to help them get to know who they are by talking about their options. Be careful that you don't say anything to show your preference because it may cause them to choose what they think you want to hear.

Instead of saying "I like red" when discussing whether to wear a red or blue dress to school, you can mention how blue is the color of the sky and red is the color of flowers. This tells them that both colors are good, so it's up to them for what they like.

Help Your Foster Kids FIT IN

Foster care is viewed as a temporary situation even when the child is in care for years. Because it is temporary, many kids feel like they never belong anywhere or fit in. This situation can hamper their emotional development and cause irreparable damage. However, foster parents can provide a sense of permanency and belonging even in a temporary situation.

Include the foster child in family events. Take them along to meet your parents, grandparents and cousins. Make them part of your birthday and Christmas

celebrations. Celebrate their birthday in ways similar to how you celebrate yours, your spouse's, and other kids you have. It will help them feel like part of the family.

Get them involved in activities just for them. Sign them up for gymnastics, soccer, or basketball. If they don't have an interest, or you don't know what they're good at, try different things. Having their own activity will help them to feel "normal," like other kids. They will develop skills in something they enjoy, which will give them more confidence. They will also build friendships with others who are in the same activity. They are all a bunch of soccer players or gymnasts rather than being just foster kids. This helps them to establish their own identity which is not built on their life situation and to be part of a group where they can feel like they belong.

Even though it's difficult for foster kids to learn how to fit in and to be themselves, foster parents can make this transition period a little easier. They should be aware of the issues and find unique ways to solve them so the kids can learn who they are and become part of a group where they belong.

Source: <https://fostercare.net/help-foster-kids-fit/>



What I wish others knew about HOW FOSTER PARENTS GRIEVE

by Dr. John DeGarmo

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of being a foster parent is the moment when our child from foster care leaves our homes. As a foster parent, our home becomes a place where children placed in the foster care system come for a period of time, with the goal of being reunited with their family in the near future. Reunification is not possible for some foster children, and the birth parents' rights are terminated. As a result, these children become available for adoption, and some foster parents do indeed end up making their foster child a permanent addition to their family through adoption.

“

Grief can be expressed in a variety of ways, depending upon the individual, as it is personal.”

I have been blessed to adopt three children from foster care, myself. If reunification is not possible with the birth parents, many foster children instead are placed into a birth family member's home. Whatever the reason might be, reunification can be a difficult time for foster parents, as the child they have come to love leaves their home. Indeed, for many foster parents, contact with a former foster child after reunification is a time of deep sadness and grief, as there is no closure for the foster parents. Sadly, I have also faced two failed adoptions, as well, leaving my family devastated.

Quite simply, we grieve the loss of a child.

Each foster child is different, and each placement into a home creates different sets of emotions. As a foster parent, there may be those children we may not have strong attachments to, due to emotional or behavioral issues, yet an attachment with these children is still made, nonetheless. Some foster children will be so difficult, that they may even have to be removed for the safety of all. Still, other foster children will steal our hearts, and will become a dear and cherished member of our families, leaving you heartbroken. When any foster child leaves our homes, no matter the level of attachment, there will be emotions when it is time to say goodbye, for both ourselves and the child. Rest assured, many foster parents do feel grief during the removal of their foster child, as the child has come to be an important and loved member of their family. After all, the removal of a foster child from a foster home is akin to a loss, and any loss can cause grieving.

There are times when the removal of a foster child may come suddenly, and without any prior warning. We may only have a few days, or even a few hours, before our child from foster care is to move. This may be due to a court order, health reasons, or placement into another foster home. Other times, plenty of notice is given to the foster parents beforehand. Whenever we are told, there will sure to be emotions involved, for both our families and the foster child.

Grief can be expressed in a variety of ways, depending upon the individual, as it is personal. Some will shed tears and cry while others will hold it inside. Some will busy themselves in a task, while other will seem detached and far away. Some will blame the system, while others will suffer from depression. The departure of our child from foster care from our home can be one that is devastating for our family. These same feelings may be felt by our foster child when he is removed from his own home, and first placed in ours.

I have watched over 45 children come to live with me and my family, and then move to other homes. Each time, my wife and I have grown to love these children, caring for them as if they were our very own, and treating them the same as all the others in our home; biological, adoptive, or foster. Each time a child leaves, my wife and I experience a great sense of loss, even when we can be comforted with the knowledge that the children have gone to a good and safe home.

To be sure, it is hard being a foster parent. The grief when a child leaves can, at times, be over whelming and consuming. It is like losing a child, a member of our family. Yet, I don't want to give up when a child leaves, because my heart is heavy. There are other children out there, right now, who need a home and need a family. There is a child out there right now who needs to be loved.

Love You From Right Here: A Keepsake Book for Children in Foster Care

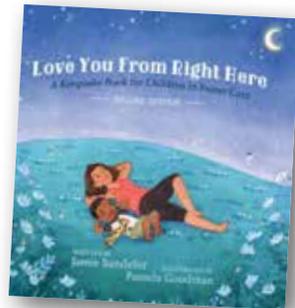


Love You From Right Here is a children's book for children in foster care. Written from the foster parent to the foster child, it takes you through an abbreviated look at the emotions a young foster child experiences throughout their transition to a new home. The

message to the child is that while they are in that home, they will be safe and loved. It also serves as a keepsake book with a journaling section. This portion of the book includes places for photos, journaling lines, and simple writing prompts. Children in foster care move an average of seven times in their lives. The keepsake section of this book gives the foster family an opportunity to provide the child with a piece of their history if they leave.

Love You From Right Here: Second Edition

Love You From Right Here takes you through an abbreviated look at the emotions a young foster child experiences throughout their transition in a new foster home.



This book also serves as a keepsake with a journaling section in the back, which provides an opportunity for foster families to give children a piece of their history if they leave.

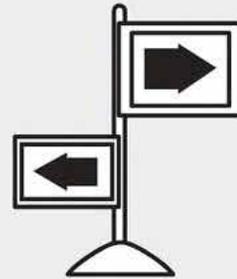
"This sweet little book is the very one I wish I had when children came and especially when they left. It provides a concrete way to hold an important piece of our shared history. Every person caring for our vulnerable children will want multiple copies."

- Kathy Harrison, Author of *Another Place at the Table* and *One Small Boat*

"I have a new favorite 'good-bye' tradition with my foster children. The final pages of the book have room for photos and memories and messages. I plan on re-stocking my supply of this book, as I fully intend on sending this along with every child who leaves my home."

- Jamie Finn, Foster Parent, Speaker, Author of "Foster the Family" blog

HOW TO PARENT TEENAGERS IN A WAY THAT HELPS THEM GROW UP



DON'T TAKE THEIR CHOICES PERSONALLY...

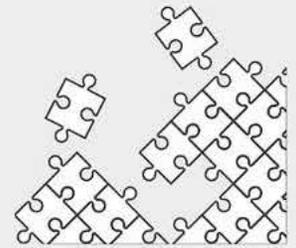
They aren't out to get you.

Don't parent out of fear - if they make different choices than you do, they aren't rejecting you - they are just finding out who they are and what they believe. This is good.

SAY 'YOU DECIDE' MORE THAN SAYING YES OR NO

Our teens need to make decisions for themselves.

This means we may not like their choices, we have to stand aside and let them walk through the consequences of their choices. But never say "I told you so!" As they learn these things the goal is to maintain relationship with them.



BE GRACIOUS AND FORGIVING WHEN THEY MAKE MISTAKES

And be humble when you make mistakes.

Walk life with your teen - remember they are a person. A unique person who needs our respect, love and support. Be real, honest, and present with them.

ADJUST FAMILY LIFE IN A WAY THAT MATCHES THEIR STAGE OF LIFE

Let your teen contribute to family life.

Family life will change as your teen's world expands. Grow with your teen - don't hold onto how it used to be - enjoy them for who they are today.



EXPECT THEM TO BE RESPONSIBLE

For their stuff, their time, their relationships, their choices.

Don't micromanage your teen - if they don't have the skill to be responsible - teach them, and then let them be responsible. Things don't have to be done your way - as long as they are responsible and respectful - their way may be just as right as your way.



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