

# Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

September / October 2017

N F A P A

## Are You The Reason Children In Foster Care Are Failing School?

By Dr. John DeGarmo

When I first began teaching, and before I was a foster parent, I knew very little about foster care, or about foster children. To be sure, what I thought I knew about children in foster care, and about the foster care system, was as far from the truth as possible. Like most of the general public, I had false ideas and beliefs about foster children, and much of it was negative, I am afraid to say. This was due mainly to the false stereotypes that abound in society. As a result, I was not prepared to meet the many needs that the students from foster homes so desperately needed while in my classroom. Even further, in all my years of college, and of additional instructional workshops, I did not have the training required to best help foster children as they struggled in my classroom, and neither did my colleagues.

After a few foster children had passed through my own home, I began to appreciate the fact that I had to not only adjust my teaching habits for foster children, but I also had to become my own foster children's advocate at their own schools. I watched my foster children struggle in my fellow teacher's classrooms, and also was witness to these same teachers as they failed to understand the various emotional challenges the children in my home were going through on a daily basis. To be sure, there were those times when I had to politely intervene on

behalf of my foster child. There were also those times when I had to sit across the table from a fellow teacher as we discussed how my foster child's behavior was interfering in the classroom setting. My desire to better assist both my colleagues and foster children led to my doctoral studies on

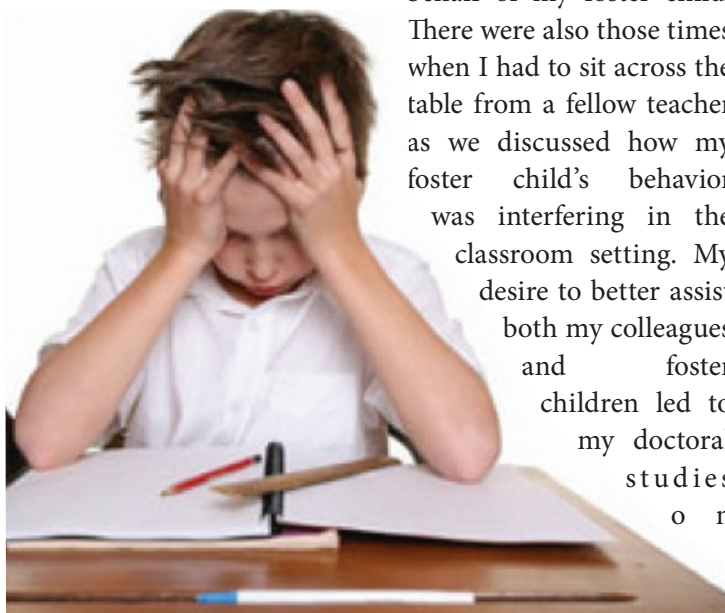
the subject. I simply wanted to help children in foster care succeed in school, as well as bring awareness about their struggles to our schools.

Foster children, in general, tend to perform below level in regard to both academic performance and in positive behavior than those students who come from either traditional homes as well as children from economically disadvantaged homes. The majority of children under foster care supervision experience problems in behavior while enrolled in public schools. Those foster children who were taken from homes due to neglect repeatedly suffer from a number of developmental delays. These include poor language and vocabulary development, thus impairing communication skills.

For many children in foster care, our schools are the last place they want to be. For that foster child who has been taken from his family, from his home, from his friends, and all he knows, and suddenly placed into a strange home late one evening, only to be forced to attend a strange school the following day, it is incredibly traumatic. Foster children often have a difficult time with exhibiting proper school behavior during the school day. For many of the children, school is a constant reminder that they are, indeed, foster children without a true home. The continuous reminder that their peers are living with biological family members while they are not is a difficult reality for them, and can be manifested in several ways. Some foster children simply withdraw and become anti-social, in an attempt to escape their current environment and world they have been thrust into. For many foster children, violent behavior becomes the norm, as they not only act out in a negative and disruptive fashion in the school, but in their foster home, too, prompting yet another move to another foster home and another school (see the book *Helping Foster Children in School: A Guide for Foster Parents, Social Workers, and Teachers*, (DeGarmo, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2015).

Since foster children are often behind academically, as well as struggle with the fact that they are coming from outside school districts with different (Continued on page 3)

**“For many children in foster care, our schools are the last place they want to be.”**



Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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Families First is published bimonthly.

When reprinting an article, please receive permission from the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association  
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This publication is supported by Grant #93.566 under a sub-grant from HHS Administration for Children and Families and Nebraska DHHS.

# Attention Foster Parents!

## Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to [nichollette@nfapa.org](mailto:nichollette@nfapa.org), send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SeptOct\\_2017](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SeptOct_2017) We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

- List three ideas to help children address their underlying feelings and internal struggles.
- Fill in the blank. Teachers, foster parents, and case workers should place \_\_\_\_\_ on a foster child.
- True or False: For some foster children it may be their first time celebrating Halloween.
- Fill in the blank. If you adopted and your child was neglected or abused, there's a chance they have \_\_\_\_\_.
- Fill in the blanks. Try to give \_\_\_\_\_ positive statements for every \_\_\_\_\_ negative statement.
- Fill in the blank. It is only the combined effort of \_\_\_\_\_, that your foster child has a chance for success in school.
- What four healthy choices can children make when others are mean and hurtful?
- True or False. We should support our kids as they experience a range of feelings.
- Tell us something you do to process and work through your foster child's trauma.

**Multiple Choice.** Experts at Vanderbilt suggest that the social-emotional skills children develop in the first \_\_\_\_ years are ones they will use and build on for the rest of their lives.    5    2    4    10

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

(Continued from page 1)

expectations, teachers in your child's school need to be conscious of this fact. Foster children struggle with many personal and emotional issues while in the foster home, and homework is often not the main objective while in the home each evening. Instead, the emotional issues your child faces may take center stage on a particular evening. Teachers need to assign homework with this in mind, being sensitive to their issues. Let your child's teacher know this, and ask that they cooperate with you on this. Meet with the teachers, the school counselor, and perhaps even an administrator of the school when you enroll your foster child, and explain these concerns to them. Like I was beforehand, it is highly likely that they have not had much experience with foster children, nor the challenges they face.

As a foster parent, you will need to reach out to the teachers, and ask for as much information and updates as possible. It is essential to your child's success in school that you become actively involved and interested in your child's school life. Look for ways to volunteer in the school. Encourage your foster child to become active in after school activities. Take an interest in your child's school work, and make sure it is done to the best of his ability each evening. Help your child study, and praise him when he does well. If you have a young foster child in the early years of school, read to him each evening, or listen to him read to you. Help him with his spelling and writing skills. Quite simply, be your foster child's advocate with his teachers, and in his school. Without your help, your child from foster care is not going to find success, in any fashion.

As I write this, school is about to begin in my area. I have already met with the teachers of the two foster children currently living in my home. Fortunately, these teachers have already taught many of the foster children who my wife and I have been blessed to have in our home over the years, and these teachers and I have been able to build a healthy working partnership, through both good times and bad. It is only with the combined effort of you, your child's teachers, and your caseworker, that your foster child has a chance for success in school. You need to lead this charge. You need to be your child's advocate. Your child is counting on you. Will you let her down?

Reprinted with permission from:

<http://drjohndegarmofostercare.weebly.com/blog/are-you-the-reason-children-in-foster-care-are-failing-school>

**"FOSTER CARE**  
**Because a child can never have**  
**too many people to love them!"**

## How To Respond To Your Child's Negative Self-talk

"I'm so dumb," your child mumbles at the kitchen table. He bangs his fist on the table and growls.

He's working on a writing assignment. Writing does not come easy. Eraser smudges fill his page showing that he was not happy with his previous attempts.

"You're not dumb, honey," you say soothingly.

He crumples the paper and yells back, "Yes I am! I'm so stupid! I'm the worst!"

You hang your head in your hands.

Is he just being dramatic? Does he really think he's dumb?

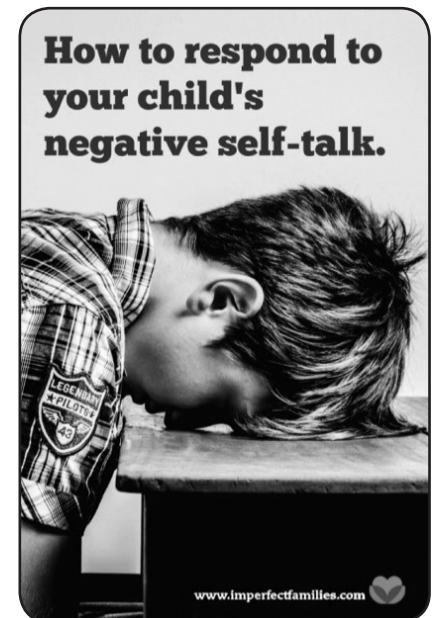
### How to respond to negative self-talk

When negative self-talk spews from your child's mouth, your knee-jerk reaction is to stop it. To give your child some reassurance or to convince them that their thinking is flawed.

Unfortunately, their words may match their feelings. They do not feel "loveable" or "wonderful" (as you may suggest), they feel "dumb," "stupid," and "like the worst kid in the world."

Instead of moving in to fix it, try these ideas to address the underlying feeling and their internal struggle.

- **Empathize:** Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand what they may be feeling. "That writing assignment's pretty challenging, eh?" or "Wow, sounds like you're feeling frustrated!" If you can't think of what to say, try a simple response like, "That's tough" or "Need a hug?"
- **Get curious:** Some kids have a hard time verbalizing the problem. When you start to explore the situation together, they may be able to understand what's really bugging them. "I wonder why this assignment is tripping you up today." or "Is it all writing assignments or this one in particular?"
- **Rewrite the script:** Once you've explored, you can work together to create some new phrases to try. Instead of "Writing is hard. I'm stupid," your child could say, "I'm working hard on writing" or "Making mistakes is part of learning." Or even, "Mom, I'm so frustrated with this assignment."





- **Problem-solve together:** Resist the urge to suggest a solution to the problem or lead them to an answer that seems right to you. Work as a team. Sometimes, there is no easy solution or quick fix because the answer is, “I have to keep practicing” or “I am working toward the goal.”
- **Challenge thoughts and feelings:** Feelings come and go, they do not define you. Your child may FEEL unlovable, but feeling something doesn’t mean it’s true. Someone can struggle and not be stupid. Talk about times when your child has overcome something difficult and felt confident or excited.

### Keep your conversations brief; don’t tackle all of this at once.

You’re eager to help your child, but it’s not always easy to accept positive, reassuring comments if you’ve been in a negative-thinking frame of mind. Expect some resistance at first. Especially if your child is not used to seeing things in a different light.

### What else can you do?

Create an environment of support, encouragement and teach frustration tolerance using these tips.

- **Give Choices:** Let your child have the option to make choices throughout the day, picking their outfit, afternoon snack, or where to do their homework. Give positive feedback for good choices and watch your criticism! If you give them a choice, keep your negative opinions to yourself.
- **Embrace Imperfection:** Everyone makes mistakes – even you! Practice using light-hearted responses to mistakes, “Oops! The milk spilled! Let’s wipe it up!” Model healthy ways to handle frustration, apologize after yelling, or acknowledge your part in a misunderstanding.
- **Focus on the Good:** Instead of nit-picking or constantly focusing on things that need to be changed, fixed or cleaned, learn to let go. Building or repairing relationship may be more important than a tidy bedroom. Try to give 5 positive statements to every 1 negative statement.
- **Encourage Independence:** Kids need parents to help them make good decisions or stay focused, but sometimes constant direction sends the message: “You can’t do it on your own.” Brainstorm or problem-solve together, ask your child’s opinion or have him offer a solution.
- **Value Perseverance:** Focus on the little steps that lead to success, overcoming an obstacle, or moving closer to a goal. Phrases such as, “You’re working really hard on that...” or “That took a lot of effort!” help your child see the benefit in the process rather than the prize at the end.
- **Teach Coping Skills:** Expose your child to a variety of coping and calming skills, work on deep breathing and create positive, helpful mantras. Practice these skills

often so your child is prepared and knows how to handle frustrating situations and discouraging thoughts.

- **Seek support:** If you have been working with your child for a while and still hear them struggling with negative self-talk, or if they threaten to harm themselves or others, it may be time to seek help from a local mental health provider. (If your child is suicidal, please get help immediately)

Looking up from your hands, you meet your child’s eyes.

“This is a frustrating assignment.”

“Yeah.” He replies.

“How can I help?” you ask.

Shrugging, he replies, “You could do it for me.”

You both laugh.

It doesn’t change the assignment, but at least you can talk about it without hearing the word “dumb.”

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## How To Prepare Your Adopted (Or Foster) Child For School Bullies

Out of everything we must prepare for on the foster and adoptive journey, one thing that catches us off guard, are the kids at school who are quick to pick on our kiddos, or ask inappropriate, hurtful questions. How can we adequately prepare our kids for some of these instances?

I still remember the snotty-nosed eight year old kids that encircled me and taunted, “Sherrie’s adopted, Sherrie’s



adopted.” It was in a corner of the school yard, out of the sight of teachers. To this day, I can recall the color of the bricks in the background.

Today, I’m thinking about your kids going off to school and some of the jeers they may experience:

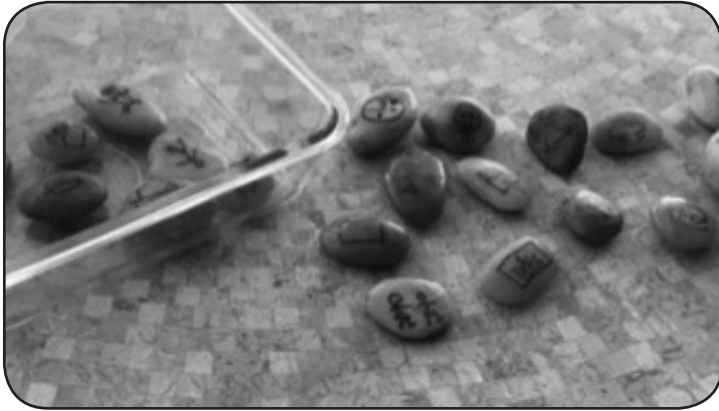
- Where do your real parents live?

- Why is your skin a different color than your parents?
- When are you going back to the place where bananas grow?
- Why didn't your real parents want you?
- How come your hair is so curly? How do you comb it?

The thought of your child being bullied must make you nervous. You are like mama and papa bears and would do anything to protect that child of yours.

However, you won't be there.

You won't be there, but there are two practical things you and your child can do to prepare for such times.



## STORY STONES

I love this activity because you can do it together as a project. Here's how:

- Gather 20-30 river rocks, at least 3" in diameter. You can get them at Menard's or Michael's.
- Purchase a plastic box with a lid large enough to hold the rocks.
- Get a magic markers, (do they still call them this?).

Then, together with your child, draw on the river rocks:

- Different people.
- Buildings (school, church, jail, hospital etc).
- Feelings (happy, sad, mad, scared).
- Vehicles (car, jeep, ambulance, fire truck).

When that's complete, encourage your child to create his own story with the rocks. This is where you step back parents, and let your child create his/her story. You will see your child come alive as he chooses the river stones to accompany the thoughts about adoption that come to mind.

Of course, you'll be applauding and affirming all the way. I can just see you!

This method will instill your child's creative story in his heart, rather than trying to memorize facts about his adoption or what he thinks others expect him to say.

I now share my adoption story by saying, **"I relish the fact that I was adopted!"**

There's another tool I know you'll appreciate if you aren't

familiar with it yet. In the past, whenever speaking, I've taught it.

## The WISE-UP POWER WORKBOOK

Another effective tool that helps your child set healthy boundaries. Created by **the Center for Adoption Support and Education**, it's a hands-on approach to help your child remember four healthy choices they can make when others are mean and hurtful.

**The first choice is: W = Walk Away.**

Not long ago, I spoke with a teen adoptee about bullying. When I

told him he could just walk away, he was shocked. He couldn't imagine doing that. The explanation is that when you turn your back and walk away, it says to the other person, "What you did was hurtful and inappropriate and I will not take it."

**The second choice: I = It's Private.**

Perhaps your daughter is asked who her "real" parents are. She can put her fingers up to her lips, and say, "Ya know what? That's private." Then, walk away.

**Third choice: S = Share.**

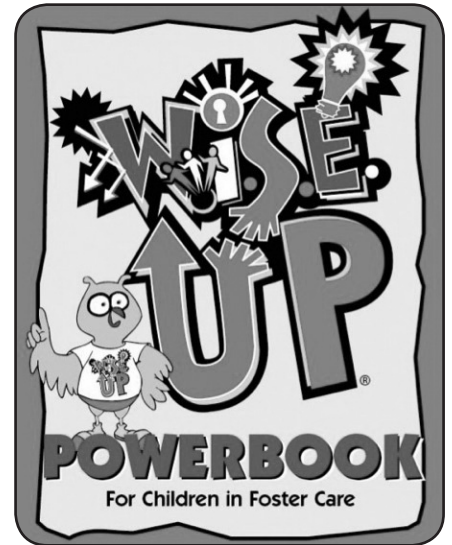
Maybe another child is just curious about your child's story. You can teach your child to first ask himself if he feels comfortable sharing. If so, he can share something personal, such as, "I was adopted from Russia." Assure your child that he doesn't have to tell the whole story. Share one tidbit and see how the listener responds. Only share more if your child feels safe.

**The last choice: E = Educate** about adoption.

I love thinking about nasty kids being educated about adoption. "Did you know that 60% of families in the US are touched by adoption?" That might make the bully's chin drop. If he comes back with another bullying statement, go for Walk Away.

*This is a guest post by our good friend, Sherrie Eldridge. Her best-selling work, *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*, is considered required reading by many US adoption agencies. In 2010, she was named Indiana's Congressional Angel of Adoption by the Honorable Dan Burton, Indiana Congressional Representative. Follow Sherrie's blog here.*

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# Making Halloween Happier

By Tracy Dee Whitt

How do we stay sane during Halloween? It can be hard, even with kids who don't have sensory issues, or attachment issues. The first goal is to make it fun for your child. For children with attachment issues, I don't agree with the approach of removing everything fun in their life. If there's no fun, there are no opportunities to grow as a family, nor do they feel they will ever get to do anything, so why try to be good? Let them do something for Halloween, and I don't just mean attending a school party.

Even though you're letting your child participate in Halloween, that doesn't mean all expectations go out to the trash with the candy wrappers. Have guidelines before you go out; what you will be doing, what you expect them to do, and how you expect them to act. That doesn't mean it will happen, but you need to set a precedent.

A major component of Halloween is costumes, and they can be a catastrophe. Mom has expectations of what her child will wear, how cute it will be. She puts the costume on her adorable daughter, and daughter promptly removes it saying, "I hate the wig, it itches." I'm not veering too far off our last costume trial. There are still some of us who still live in LaLa Land where cute children wear adorable outfits, where we spend too much money and are disappointed when our child doesn't want to wear what we planned.

This doesn't mean we come up with a new ensemble, no. But it does remind me that Halloween is for my child to get some candy and hopefully have fun. Battling the costume makes it fairly miserable for everyone.

If you adopted and your child was neglected or abused, **there's a chance they have sensory issues**. In short, sensory issues means a person has heightened sensitivities to everything, and Halloween can bring on everything. (Sometimes people who have sensory issues need sensory input, but this night is usually a sensory overload.)

Bright lights, cold weather, hot costumes, screaming, laughing kids, blaring music, skeletons that make sudden movements, scratchy, itchy outfits. It's a lot for a typical person,

but add sensitivities and it can be an irritating, maddening conglomeration. So don't fight the costume. If this is the first time you've become aware of sensory issues and notice them in your child (you can read more about them [HERE](#)), then go ahead and buy a different costume with comfort in mind.

We have a friend whose son has Aspergers, and he wore a sheet (ghost) for a couple years (he's seven, so you know he's not a teen who just wants easy so he can bag some candy). By the end of the evening last Halloween, the ghost was a ghost no more, the sheet was off. Wearing anything was irritating to him, and even the sheet was too much by the end of the day. **His parents opted for a good time rather than a battle.** They recognized his sensitivities and went with it.

Our son who has Autism has some of those same sensitivities. Last year he loved Cat in the Hat, in fact one of the few words he said was, "Go, go, go..." from the show Cat in the Hat on PBS. At the last minute we ran to the shop and purchased costumes, and they had THE Cat! Perfect. He also had an obsession with hats at the time, so we thought this costume was a dunk in the tank. Well, he wore the hat for two houses, and it was off. It's okay, we were lucky he wasn't tearing off the remainder of the outfit while he traversed the streets in his wagon.

The wagon... while trick-or-treating, the adults on the other side of the door asked several times if he wanted candy, and they looked at him with a forlorn expression, feeling bad that our poor child was stuck in a wagon while his sister (who is the same size) walked to each door and collected her stash. What those people didn't know: Jeremiah had no idea what we were doing, he would've fought going to each door (because he didn't know what we were doing), he didn't eat candy (not the kind they were handing out anyway), and he was comfortable in his safe wagon. That last point is most important. If we are going to let Payton have a good time trick-or-treating, then Jeremiah should be kept comfortable, and he was.

During trick-or-treating, or any event that includes walking farther than one-hundred feet, our son, Jeremiah, rides in that wagon or a stroller. (That doesn't mean he's inactive, on the contrary he's VERY busy, but this is for his sanity, as well as ours.) This year his wagon will go as Lightning McQueen from the movie Cars, and he will be "driving." He loves the movie Cars and any of the little Cars vehicles that have eyeballs attached. Even though he may not notice what he's riding in, we know we did our best to give him what he likes and what's most agreeable to him.

Don't let costumes add to your battles, there are enough. Make an effort to have fun, and know that it may not work out, but if it does, that would be awesome, wouldn't it? Have a Happy Halloween.

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This was originally posted on the author's website:  
[www.lovinadoptin.com](http://www.lovinadoptin.com)





# Halloween For Foster Children

Halloween is celebrated different ways by different families. So is the same as in foster care. Foster families have to think about not only their kids or just one kid in particular but all the kids in the home. Some kids have celebrated Halloween before, others have never experienced and some for religious purposes just some don't celebrate it at all.

American traditions have turned Halloween into something that kids can have fun with. As a child I learned about God and lived in a Christian foster home. Before and after foster care Halloween for me had always been about dressing up, trick or treating and carving pumpkins and a chance to have fun family time. I think Halloween can be celebrated in a way that doesn't involve the devil, demons or evil because that's the way we celebrated it.

For some foster children it may be the first time celebrating the holiday. They may not know what to expect so you may want to discuss it with them. You can sit down and carve a pumpkin and discuss it or do so while picking up a Halloween



costume. You may even want to sit down and watch some kid friendly Halloween TV shows or movies with your foster kids to give them a fun idea about the holiday. It's a perfect opportunity to connect with your foster child by sitting down and reading a Halloween book together as well.

Even if you don't celebrate Halloween with your foster kids there are plenty of other fun ways to enjoy the night. It's a good idea to do something that night even if you're not celebrating. Once again it's a great time to bond over a book, TV or any other family activity. I think it's important not to feel left out while the other kids they know are out doing things.

If you do go trick or treating make sure to go over the rules with your foster kids before going out. You might want to discuss what houses to go to, crossing the street, and how you want to handle the candy (of course you want to go through the candy to make sure everything is safe). Have a fun and have a safe Halloween!

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# Foster Care Tip Of The Month

By Dr. John Degarmo



Teachers, foster parents, and case workers should place reasonable expectations on a foster child, not only in the student's academics, but also his behavior and social skills. After determining where the child's academic level of performance is at, and what he is capable of, adults need to ensure that they do not demand more than he is capable of. These reasonable expectations must be realistic ones. After all, each child is different, every child learns differently, and every child is not bound for Harvard or Oxford after high school.

Children in foster care, as we have seen, perform at a lower academic level than their peers, for a variety of reasons. This fact alone needs to be remembered by those who care for them. Indeed, these caretakers should not expect school to be the focus of their young lives, as it is not. This is important to bear in mind with students in foster care, as they are likely not going to strive for academic excellence. Furthermore, many foster children are not going to place school work as a priority in their lives. More so, a large number of these students just may not care about their school work, their grades, or how they behave in school. This will not change magically overnight once a child is placed into a foster home.

**“This may be due to the fact that the child had lived in an environment or home for many years where school was not stressed as important.”**

To be sure, it may take a very large length of time for a student in foster care to change his attitude towards school after he is placed into a foster home. Indeed, he may not change his attitude towards school at all while under the supervision of foster care, or even for the rest of his life, for that matter. This may be due to the fact that the child had lived in an environment or home for many years where school was not stressed as important. To that end, teachers, caseworkers, and foster parents need to be aware of this possibility.

*Reprinted with permission. Dr. John DeGarmo is an international foster care consultant, author, speaker, and most importantly, a foster and adoptive father. He has been a foster parent for 14 years, with over 50 children coming through his home. He is the author of many books, including the book Faith and Foster Care: How We Impact God's Kingdom.*

# Waiting For A Forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.

## Jacob

**Age: 16 years old**

Jacob is an avid lover of sports- especially football and basketball. He doesn't mind getting his hands dirty and has aspirations of one day having a job in construction. Jacob enjoys listening to music and almost always has his headphones in. Jacob likes to stay active by riding his bike or helping to mow the lawn. On his down time, Jacob also enjoys word searches, video games, and occasionally reading. Jacob is looking forward to becoming part of a forever family, but also wishes to maintain relationships with the important people in his life.

**Connections:** Jacob will need support in maintaining relationships with the important people in his life.



## LaQuinn, JaVonn, Daemarii and Mario

**Age: 6/29/2007, 12/12/2008, 03/09/2011, 09/17/2012**



These 4 active boys love spending time together and having fun. LaQuinn, the oldest, does well academically and enjoys school. He likes to play games and is a great artist-he loves drawing and creating art. LaQuinn is protective of his younger brothers and is a positive role model for them. JaVonn, the next oldest, is described as fun and loving towards others. Much like his older brother, Javonn does well in school and is a good role model for his brothers. Javonn likes to be active and takes pride in helping others. He is very creative

and enjoys using his hands to create things.

Those who spend time with Daemarii, describe him as very happy and loving. He looks up to his older brothers and wants to do everything they are doing. Daemarii is very social and enjoys playing with other children his age.

The youngest of the 4 boys, Mario, is a little shadow to all his older brothers. He loves spending time with them playing games. Mario is described as happy and outgoing.

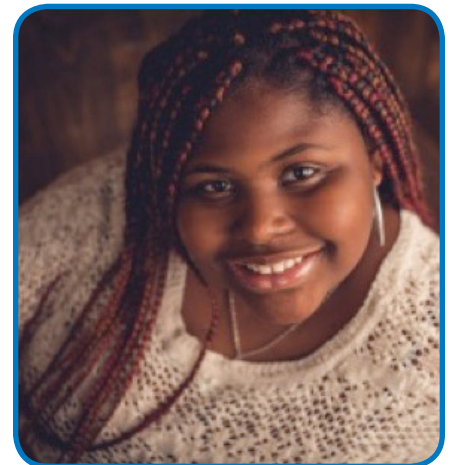
The boys are very bonded and need to be placed all together in a Forever Home.

**Connections :** The boys need support in maintaining relationships with their two sisters.

## Honesty

**Age: 16 years old**

Honesty is a fun loving young girl with a smile that is contagious! She is helpful, kind-hearted and fashionable. Honesty's favorite activities include shopping, getting her hair and nails done, texting her friends and listening to music. She loves eating seafood at Olive Garden and getting caramel frappe's from McDonald's. Honesty is described by others as compassionate and able to comfort



others when they appear to be in need. She has big dreams of becoming a lawyer someday, but also wants to be a cosmetologist. Honesty would love to learn how to drive and obtain her learner's permit. She does well in school, but admits her favorite part is socializing with her friends. Honesty is a good role model to younger children and volunteers her time at a daycare. Honesty believes that having a forever family means that she will always have someone there to support and encourage her.

**Connections:** Honesty needs to maintain relationships with her siblings.

For more information on these children or others on the Heart Gallery please contact Sarah at:

Email: [scaldararo@childsaving.org](mailto:scaldararo@childsaving.org)

Phone: 402-504-3673



# I'm Not A Precious Mama:

## Why it doesn't matter what others think about my parenting a child with reactive attachment disorder

We'd like to thank this brave mama, Laura Smith, for sharing her story as a member of our greater RAD community. The more we join and advocate together, the stronger we become. Thanks Laura.

I was raised by a Southern mama. She kept house like Better Homes and Garden. She hosted dinner for company like a Southern Living cover feature. She kept our manners and social behaviors in line like a recurring Dear Abby column—and we appreciated it for all the compliments we got on what well-behaved children we were.

Fast forward to my early marriage and pregnancy years. I began to develop my own idea of what kind of mama I wanted to become. I wanted all the charm and impressiveness of my mama's talents but I wanted really good personal time with my babies too. I wanted Southern Living meets Family Fun. I wanted to be a precious mama—for my parenting to look beautiful and appealing.

**Life was so simple as our first two sons were born that my vision of motherhood fell right into**

**place.** I had all the time in the world to play pat-a-cake, read books, and play puzzles. I strapped them to my chest or sang to them in the bouncer while I cooked. We took a walk every morning and every afternoon.

As they grew, they learned to play independently but we still read stories every day. They still ran up to hug my legs a few dozen times every night. Tantrums were few and misbehaviors redirected easily enough. They knew me. They trusted me. I appreciated the joy and simplicity of our family. Honestly, the compliments on how sweet our little family was weren't bad either. We were pretty precious.

**Fast forward another seven years—we've added a daughter through birth and a daughter and son through adoption.** Our third son, from the day his foster parents said the hardest goodbye and delivered him to our home, has taken us on a traumatic and educational journey on what reactive attachment disorder (RAD) is and its effects on a family.

He has raged from day one for both security and autonomy. Our other children have struggled from day one to understand, to not be afraid, and to not be harmed. We have struggled

from day one to know what to do to help both our son and the rest of our family cope—while friends pulled away and others offered correction. Some days our aim was healing. Other days it was survival, at best.

We're just past the four-year anniversary of his gotcha-day now and we are also, just now, finally under the care of a reactive attachment disorder specialized counselor.

Finally, someone isn't looking at us as if we need parenting classes when we describe how our son behaves and struggles to have healthy relationships at home. We're finally talking to someone who KNOWS WHAT TO DO about what feels like unbearable damage and trauma in our own home despite the happy and precious framework from which we started. We're finally able to have some confidence in the way we parent him.

**You see, in those beginning years of being an adoptive parent, it was hard to wrap our heads around the fact that the parenting techniques we had used with our older boys weren't helping our newest child.** How could age-old

wisdom fail us now? How could reverse psychology and Parent magazine expert tips not make a dent in our effort to stave off 2-hour-long screaming fits? How could a child so in need of stable and loving parenting react so violently to what he needed the most?

It hurt and bewildered us. And I'm quite sure it hurt and bewildered him.

We were so desperate for help to ease the turmoil. It

was hard NOT to change our parenting techniques each time we read something new, took a new training class, or endured the disapproving glances or remarks of others. Maybe we were the problem? If we could just find the right approach—the right wording, the right balance to the power struggle—then maybe, just maybe, we could unlock his heart and his walls would break down. Maybe we could find the boy we call 'son'.

It's taken us four (I don't even have an adjective here) years to let go of that notion.

Four years of enduring clichés and epitaphs and parenting book recommendations from friends and family members who can't imagine his struggle is really as deep and ugly and hard as we say it is.

Four years of others thinking we treat our son differently because we're angry—or worse—insensitive. As if it's never occurred to us that his screaming fits, refusal to accept our authority and love, and violence towards his sibling are coming from a very damaged and untrusting heart.

That maybe we forgot about (\_\_\_\_) or haven't heard about (\_\_\_\_).



Four years of feeling like we were losing our minds.  
 Four years of being. So. Very. Alone.  
 And afraid.

**It's taken time to learn how very important it is to not be distracted by what other people think of how we parent him.** It's taken us four years to learn how long and hard a road this is going to be.

Four years to be able to tell you with confidence—

I want to cuddle with my son. Yet, he wants me to not want to. So he pushes me away with raging defiance and then, during correction, wants to snuggle in my lap.

I want him to be able to have a normal social life with activities and friends. Yet, he doesn't make friends. He shops for new parents he thinks might make him 'happy'.

I want a happy family life with all of our children. Yet, he wants to be in his own space and in his own world so he doesn't have to trust or care about anyone. Because people hurt.

His siblings want to play with him. On his terms, playing means, "Make me happy or else."

**I cannot simply treat him like any other child and hope for the best.**

I cannot give him all the ice cream and patience and hugs and assurance and make it all better.

**"I'm the Mom He needs."**

I have to be firmer with him than I've ever had to be with the others because he is constantly expecting the structure to implode. And constantly testing to see if it will.

I have to keep him physically closer and allow less freedom because his fear and distrust gives way to erratic emotions and behaviors. The closer he is, the better I can guide him.

I have to ask you not to hug him because when he was very little and his brain was learning what 'parents' are, 'parents' didn't equal 'permanent' or 'good' or 'happy'. Your cheerful embrace looks 'happy'—and he so desperately wants to be 'happy'—so his heart wants you to be his parent. And that's so destructive to the relationship he needs to have with us.

I cannot be held captive by the sorrow of knowing that the people I love and from whom I truly want approval, acceptance, and support think I may be parenting poorly.

I have to stay focused on what my son and my family need most.

I have to parent in a way that doesn't make sense to you in order to help him make sense of his world.

I can't afford to be distracted.

I have a son to raise.

I'm not a jerk. But I'm not a precious mom anymore either.

I'm the mom he needs.

*Reprinted with permission from:*

<https://instituteforattachment.org/im-not-a-precious-mama-why-it-doesnt-matter-what-others-think-about-my-parenting-a-child-with-reactive-attachment-disorder/>

# Spaulding – Making the Commitment to Adoption

Facilitated by the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

**September 15, 2017: 6:00 PM -9:30 PM &**

**September 16, 2017: 8:00 AM -5:30 PM**

Western Nebraska Community College – Harms Center, Room C150

2620 College Park, Scottsbluff

Register online:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ScottsbluffSpaulding>

**Earn 12 hours of in-service credit**

The Spaulding program is offered to prospective adoptive families. Spaulding training offers families the tools and information that they need to:

- Explain how adoptive families are different
- Importance of separation, loss, and grief in adoption
- Understand attachment and its importance in adoption
- Anticipate challenges and be able to identify strategies for managing challenges as an adoptive family
- Explore the lifelong commitment to a child that adoption brings

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## Residential Treatment:

### When Holding On Means Letting Go

*By Sara Borgstede*

As we drive through the beautiful rolling hills of western New York, my husband reaches over to grasp my hand. I glance over and see a stream of tears run down his cheek as he navigates the car.

My eyes are dry. I've cried so much over these days, I have no tears left.

**We are driving our son to the residential treatment center where he will live for the next year, and each mile takes our boy farther away from home.** How is it possible that loving someone means days like today — when holding on means letting go?

**Residential Treatment: Never the Goal**

**No one gives birth or adopts a child with the hope that residential treatment will be in the picture someday.**

Residential treatment is when a child lives in an institutional setting 24 hours a day/7 days a week under careful supervision.

What's ironic and unfortunate is that kids do better in families. Certainly, children with attachment issues NEED to be with families.

How will my son learn to attach to his parents if he is not *with* his parents?

Yet there often comes a day when safety supersedes all else. **Yes, the goal is family preservation, but not at any cost.**

Residential treatment wasn't initially in our plans, but for the last several years we have known this was most likely coming for our son. These last few years his behavior has continued to spiral out of control.

Therapy and tight supervision helped. We saw progress. Improvements were made.

**Then — one afternoon our son made an incredibly poor decision, shifting our whole world dramatically and instantly.**

For the sake of our family's privacy, I'm sure you understand that I don't share specifics. In my last post I told about one mom's courageous story of living with her son's behaviors. This gives a realistic idea of the types challenges we face.

#### **Residential Treatment: Nearly Impossible to Obtain**

**When parents feel their child needs residential treatment, what are the next steps?**

Unfortunately, the path from when parents make the decision to place their child in residential treatment, and when a child actually goes to residential treatment, is often a winding, bumpy road. We knew getting a child into residential treatment was challenging, but we had no idea just how difficult the steps involved.

As one therapist told us, **"What we do to parents in our country who are seeking treatment for their children with mental health issues – it borders on criminal."**

From the time we knew our son needed residential treatment until the time he went to residential treatment was 2 1/2 years.

We applied and were denied multiple times.

We tried different funding sources.

We advocated through agencies.

We hired an attorney.

We went to court.

We were threatened and threats were made against us in regard to our reputations, our jobs, and the security of the other children in our home.

We were mocked. We were belittled. We were patronized.

The pressure placed upon us to walk away from all of this and keep our son in our home — despite the fact that he was a danger to himself and others – was massive.



Residential treatment is incredibly expensive and sadly, at the end of the day much of the conflict comes down to who will pay. There are several ways residential treatment is funded:

1. **Insurance.** Because private insurance will eventually run out, children who are privately insured will need to apply for Medicaid. With a mental health diagnosis, a child can be placed in a residential setting if he meets certain strict criteria.
2. **Court systems.** If charges are pressed, a judge can order placement in a residential setting.
3. **Foster care.** Parents may voluntarily place a child in foster care. The foster care system will now have physical custody of the child but parents retain parental rights. If no suitable foster home is found, a child may be placed in a group home or residential setting. The goal is reunification after the child has received proper care. The child may also age out of the foster care system.
4. **Relinquishment of Parental Rights or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).** When parents no longer wish to maintain a relationship (most often this is the case with an adoption situation), they move to relinquish parental rights. Depending on the state, relinquishment is not easy to obtain. Typically another adoptive family needs to be arranged before a judge will grant relinquishment. Adoption is legally binding. However, in the case of a child with severe mental health or behavioral issues, a judge may grant relinquishment in order for the child to receive needed services.
5. **School districts.** Although rare, it is possible for a school district to pay for an out-of-district placement if parents can prove this is the least restrictive option and no in-district option is suitable to meet the needs of the child.
6. **Private pay.** Parents may pay privately for residential care.

**The facility where my son is – it's a good place.** The staff cares about the kids and they welcome us as part of our son's treatment team.

The program is surrounded by beautiful countryside.

This is good.

**It's not home, though.**

*Reprinted with permission from:*

<https://blog.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/residential-treatment-holding-means-letting-go/>

*This was originally posted on the author's website, The Holy Mess – Balancing Faith, Family, and Fitness, on June 4, 2017.*



# How Do You Process Your Child's Trauma?

By Mike Berry

We spend so much of this journey fighting for our children, and helping them fight through the trauma they've endured, that we rarely take time to process it ourselves. That's why a simple question, recently asked of me, has me thinking...

This past weekend we attended a discussion group in a small coffee house in a neighboring town to ours. The topics ranged from pain, to overcoming grief, to God, to suffering in the world, to personal struggles. And then the facilitator asked us a question that we've rarely been asked over our 15-year adoptive journey: "How do YOU process and work through your child's trauma?"

Me? Interesting....

Over the past 5 years, in particular, we've spoken on, written on, and counseled many on how to help their child through their trauma. We've even driven home the importance of self-care and being in community when the *you-know-what* hits the fan. We've written articles, posts, recorded podcasts, even taught breakout sessions at conferences on understanding trauma, techniques to apply to your parenting when your child is in an all-out rage, and more.

But when it comes to the nitty gritty, down to the bone, personal processing of the trauma your child has gone through, and continues to go through, sometimes we float past that. And it's not something I've spent much time considering. *Me. Us. We.* How do WE process this? How do WE spin in our minds, this child whom we love, and the pain, fear, rage, and fight that lives within him all..the..time?

I answered as best as I could. I talked about all of the things we've shared with the thousands of parents who follow our work. I even shared honestly some of our own thought process when we've been in the muck and mire of the trench hoping and praying for a shred of hope to shine forth.

And then it hit me just how we process.....

*This.*

A safe space.

A real space.

A non-judgmental space.

A place to dump our truck of deep emotions, let others know that *we're not okay*, and not receive the typical jaw-clinching, eyes bouncing away from us, "I can believe he just said that," subtle raise of the eyebrow look from well-meaning people who have no freaking idea what I'm talking about (or pretend not to)!

Fact is, we're on-guard so often that we rarely take time to really, deeply grieve over our children. Rarely do we give ourselves permission to process the desperation we feel deep in the caverns of our heart for these children we so deeply love and cherish. The list is long....*the haunting memories they can*

*never escape. The fear that propels them to behave in ways that leave us exhausted and emotionally done. The fight for control that they cannot fully understand or articulate. The longing in their eyes to connect, but the inability to do so.*

We're guarded, and rarely show weakness because so much is on the line. To be completely honest (as if we're not already all the time), we fear showing any amount of weakness.... any amount of vulnerability. We've been burned by school counselors, therapists, pediatricians, and OTs in the past when we've done this. When we've decided to let our guard down, show our grief, share our children's trauma (not from a factual perspective, but a broken one), we've been labeled, criticized, and judged.

And we really, really, really, really don't need that. We're in the fight of our lives here. We believe in our children.... we love them as if we created them biologically, but we're in a constant state of advocacy. So, no, we don't take time to personally process their trauma....to grieve....to ugly cry without inhibition....allowing the deep hurt we feel for them, that spends its time pinned up in our brain, to flow freely.

*Safe space.*

That's where it begins. That's what we need to process.... that and maybe a cup of coffee....or a shot of whiskey....or a massage for 7 days straight....*just sayin!*

The person facilitating the discussion group said those golden words as we wrapped up.... "We want this to be safe space for you."

Yes. A million times over....YES!

Reprinted with permission from:

[www.confessionsofanadoptiveparent.com](http://www.confessionsofanadoptiveparent.com)



## Upcoming In-service Training

### Facilitated by the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

#### The Kinship Connection – four locations!

This six hour training will provide Relative & Kinship families with training on the following topics:

- The Legal Process
- Trauma & Attachment
- Behavior Management
- Loss & Grief
- RPPS/Respite
- Safety
- Redefined Roles
- Permanency Options for Children & Youth

**Saturday, Sept. 9, 2017 from 9 am – 4 pm: Omaha**

**Saturday, Sept. 16, 2017 from 9 am – 4 pm: North Platte**

**Saturday, Sept. 23, 2017 from 9 am – 4 pm: Lincoln**

**Saturday, Sept. 30, 2017 from 9 am – 4 pm: Wayne**

Registration is required. Register online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KinshipConnection>

#### Youth Mental Health First Aid – two locations!

Earn 6 hours of in-service credit

**Saturday, September 30, 2017 | 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM**

**Regional West Medical Center,**

**South Plaza – Room 1202, Scottsbluff**

**OR**

**Saturday, October 14, 2017 | 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM**

**Good Shephard Lutheran Church,**

**11204 204th Street, Gretna**

Registration is required.

Register online:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YMHFAinservice>

Youth Mental Health First Aid reviews the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents ages 12-18. It emphasizes the importance of early intervention and covers how to help an adolescent in crisis or experiencing a mental health challenge. This non-clinical course will help caregivers better understand typical adolescence, how to address basic suicide ideations and verbalizations, understand and use the MHFA Action Plan

## Super Science Kids, Inc.

I had the pleasure of meeting Angelica in July. We were one of her 15 stops on her tour this summer with her parents where she donated science kits for foster children to put in our “Kits for Kids” bags.

Her interest in helping to share her love of science started when Angelica found out a friend was in the foster care system and was going to be adopted. Her Grandfather encouraged her to start her own non-profit so she did! She talks with

different organizations and fundraises to help with the cost of materials for making the kits. She is hoping her fun science projects might spark and interest in science while giving the kids something fun to do.

Thank you Angelica! You are an inspiration!

If you have a new foster child in your home and need a “Kits for Kids” bag, please contact the NFAPA office or the Resource Family Consultant in your area.

You can learn more about Angelica and Super Science Kids, Inc. by visiting: <https://m.facebook.com/SuperScienceKidsORG/>



## NFAPA Board Position Openings:

**The following positions are vacant on the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NFAPA) Board of Directors.**

- Western Service Area Representative (Southwest & Panhandle)
- Northern Service Area Representative
- At Large Board Member

If you are a current or former foster and/or adoptive parent and have a desire to serve an organization that empowers, supports and advocates for Nebraska families please submit your bio to Felicia Nelsen, Executive Director, at [Felicia@nfapa.org](mailto:Felicia@nfapa.org). Please contact Felicia at 402-476-2273 with questions.

# Allowing Kids To Embrace Big Emotions Is Good Parenting—and It's Science

By Heather Marcoux

As parents, few things are more heartbreaking than witnessing our children in emotional pain—whether it's a tantrum, extreme sadness or a bad case of the "no's!" It's only natural to want to help them feel better *fast*, but a new study out of UC Berkeley suggests allowing kids to feel bad is better than telling them to cheer up—as feeling pressured to “turn a frown upside down” may just result in a deeper funk.

**“This might mean talking more about why our children are sad than how we could cheer them up.”**

In a press release about the findings, senior author Iris Mauss, an associate professor of psychology at UC Berkley, noted the way parents respond to their children's emotions may be predictors of mental wellness for those children down the line.

“We found that people who habitually accept their negative emotions experience fewer negative emotions, which adds up to better psychological health,” Mauss said. “Maybe if you have an accepting attitude toward negative emotions, you're not giving them as much attention.”

According to the researchers, people who commonly resist their dark emotions can end up feeling more psychologically stressed than people who allow bad feelings to exist and clear up over time.

Specifically, people who accepted their feelings of sadness, disappointment and resentment instead of judging or denying them reported fewer mood disorder symptoms than those who were critical of their bleakest feelings, even after six months.

The study has big implications for parents, as the researchers suggested **we should support our kids as they experience a range of feelings**—and we should avoid urging them to move on from a dark emotion before they are ready.

**This might mean talking more about why our children are sad than how we could cheer them up.**

“By asking parents about their attitudes about their children's emotions, we may be able to predict how their children feel about their emotions, and how that might affect their children's mental health,” said Mauss.

The researchers plan to expand their work to look at how upbringing impacts a person's ability to accept the emotional ups and downs of life.

In the meantime, The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Vanderbilt University suggests steps parents can take to help our kids understand and accept a range of emotions. These include:

1. **Taking care of ourselves:** Knowing when we are feeling overwhelmed and asking for help when we need it shows our kids that it's OK to accept our emotions.
2. **Role-modeling expressing feelings in healthy ways:** As an example, in a moment of anger, you may say, “Mommy is feeling really frustrated because she spilled coffee all over herself! I am going to count to five and then go change.”
3. **Talking about feelings:** Even babies can benefit from exposure to the vocabulary of emotions. When children develop a “feelings vocabulary” that they can use to communicate what they are feeling and experiencing, they are better equipped to understand and accept a whole range of complex emotions.

**The experts at Vanderbilt suggest that the social-emotional skills children develop in the first two years are ones they will use and build on for the rest of their lives—so it's never too early to teach your little one that it's perfect OK to feel bad sometimes.**

Republished with permission from: <https://www.mother.ly/>

## No Longer Fostering?

**We would love to hear from you.**

We are interested to learn about families leaving foster care and the reasons behind their decision. This information can assist us to advocate for future policies to support foster families. If you are a former foster parent, please take a moment to provide feedback on your foster care experience. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/nfapaexitsurvey>





# NFAPA Support Groups

Have you ever thought about attending a support group? NFAPA offers support groups to foster, adoptive and kinship families! This is your chance to gain understanding and parenting tips through trainings, discussions and networking with fellow foster families.

This is a great way to meet other foster/adoptive families in your area! In-service training is offered at most support groups for those needing credit hours for relicensing. Up to date information with each support group location will be on the calendar page on our website at [www.nfapa.org](http://www.nfapa.org). Support Groups will be cancelled for inclement weather.

Contact a Resource Family Consultant for more information:

**Jolie Camden (Panhandle Area):** 308-672-3658

**Tammy Welker (Columbus):** 402-989-2197

**Terry Robinson (Central/Southwest Area):** 402-460-7296

**NFAPA Office:** 877-257-0176

## IN-PERSON SUPPORT GROUPS

- **Alliance Support Group:** Meets the third Thursday of the month. Registration is required. Contact Jolie Camden to register.

Famer's State Bank Building, 1320 W. 3rd St, entrance in rear. 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**September 21, 2017**

**November 16, 2017**

**October 19, 2017**

**December 21, 2017**

- **Scottsbluff Support Group:** Meets the second Tuesday of the month. Registration is required. Contact Jolie Camden to register.

Regional West Medical Center,  
in South Plaza Room 1204. 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**September 12, 2017**

**November 14, 2017**

**October 10, 2017**

**December 12, 2017**

- **Chadron Support Group:** Registration is required. Contact Jolie Camden to register.

The Refuge, 132 W 3rd Street. 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**September 26, 2017**

**November 7, 2017**

**October 17, 2017**

- **North Platte Support Group:** Meets every other month on the first Thursday. Dinner and childcare provided. Registration is required. Contact Terry Robinson to register.

Nebraska Children's Home Society,  
121 N Dewey St #206. 6:00-8:00 p.m.

**October 5, 2017**

**December 7, 2017**

- **Columbus Support Group:**

Meets the second Tuesday of the month  
(except July and December).

Childcare available. Contact Tammy Welker.

(Thank you Building Blocks and Behavioral Health Specialists for providing childcare!).

Peace Lutheran Church, 2720 28<sup>th</sup> St. 7:00-8:30 p.m.

**September 12, 2017**

**November 14, 2017**

**October 10, 2017**

## ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

### FACES-Online Support Group:

Every Tuesday 9:00-10:00 p.m. Central Time

Contact Nicholette at [Nicholette@nfapa.org](mailto:Nicholette@nfapa.org) to become a member of this closed group.

Meets weekly to discuss issues foster parents are facing. Support only.

## TRANSRACIAL SUPPORT GROUP

- **Parenting Across Color Lines:** This group supports and strengthens racial identity in transracial families. Support only.

Meets the fourth Monday of the month  
(except August & December).

Children welcome to attend with parents.

Newman United Methodist Church,  
2242 R Street, Lincoln. 7:00-8:30 pm

**September 25, 2017**

**November 27, 2017**

**October 23, 2017**

**December 11, 2017**

Family Event on **December 11, 2017**--RSVP required.

Family pot-luck on **October 23, 2017**

Contact the NFAPA office to register for Family Events or any questions.

For more info:

<https://www.facebook.com/colorlineslincoln/>



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## JOIN NFAPA ....your support will enable NFAPA to continue supporting foster parents state-wide!

### Benefits

- Ongoing trainings/conferences at local and state level
- Networking opportunities with other foster families, adoptive families, and relative caregivers
- Opportunity for all foster families, adoptive families and relative caregivers to be actively involved in an association by serving on committees and/or on the Executive Board
- Working to instigate changes by alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system
- An advocate on your behalf at local, state and national levels
- 25% of membership dues goes toward an NFAPA Scholarship

### Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:  
NFAPA, 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D  
Lincoln, NE 68521.

Questions? Please call us at 877-257-0176.

NFAPA is a 501c3 non-profit organization comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors and Mentors.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a Foster/Adoptive Parent. I have fostered for \_\_\_\_\_ years.  
(circle one)

I am with \_\_\_\_\_ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
- Family Membership** (married foster or adoptive parents), \$35
- Supporting Membership** (individuals wishing to support our efforts), \$75
- Organization Membership** (organizations wishing to support our efforts), \$150
- Friends of NFAPA**, \$5 billed Monthly

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

- Gold Donation, \$1,000       Silver Donation, \$750
- Platinum Donation, \$500       Bronze Donation, \$250
- Other, \$ \_\_\_\_\_