

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

January/February 2018

N F A P A

10 New Year Resolutions for Foster Care

By Dr. John DeGarmo,

Leading foster care expert and director of The Foster Care Institute

With more children in foster care now than in years past, the foster care system in the United States is in need of attention, and in some ways, in need of change. While not everyone can be a foster parent, everyone can help a child in foster care in some way, and in some fashion. Here are 10 ways, or 10 New Year Resolutions, for the foster care system for this New Year.

1. Awareness and Advocacy

There are a great many misconceptions and false beliefs about the foster care system. There are also not enough advocates for children in foster care. Perhaps the biggest impact one can make with those children placed in foster care is to become an advocate of change. Do your research, and find out as much about foster care and foster children as you can. Contact lawmakers, politicians, through means of emails, letters, phone calls, and other means of communication, and bring attention to the needs of children in care.

2. Become a Foster Parent

With roughly half a million children in the foster care system in the United States alone, the need is strong for good foster homes and foster parents. By becoming a foster family, you can provide stability, safety, and hope for a child in foster care. You can give love to a child who may never have been given it before. Not only will you change the life of a child, your life will change, as well.

3. Therapy

Far too many social workers and foster parents spend a great deal of time on paperwork. It often interrupts services many walks of life for the children in foster care, as well. There needs to be less paperwork, less “red tape” and more action on behalf of the child.

4. Bringing Resources to School-Aged Foster Children

Children in foster care face a great many challenges in the school system. Most are far being in reading and math skills. Teachers and school administrators are not fully equipped to meet the needs of these children. Disturbingly, 55% of children in foster care will drop out of school each year. More reform needs to be placed upon children in foster care while in school.

5. Helping Those Who Age Out

Each year, around 20,000 foster children age out of the system and attempt to begin life on their own. Of the 450,000 children in care in the United States each year, this is a large number and disturbing percentage. For many foster children, foster care is a temporary service before returning home to a parent, moving in with a biological family member, or even beginning a new life in an adopted home. Yet, for thousands who do not find reunification with family in their lives, leaving the foster care system when they age out can be not on a time of anxiety, but a time of tragedy.



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Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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Questions? Interested in becoming a member of the Board?

Call NFAPA at 877-257-0176 or 402-476-2273.

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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 Corinne@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/JanFebNewsletter2018>. 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!

1. Fill in the blank. Those interested in becoming foster parents learn that a big part of their job as foster parents is to aid _____.
2. True or False. There are numerous steps involved. Finding and keeping a job, attending visits and therapy, and maintaining sobriety is a lot to grasp at once.
3. List 3 of the 10 New Year's Resolution's for Foster Care.
4. True or False. Foster care isn't about getting kids for my family, for me. It's about giving kids a family.
5. True or False. Seventy Five Percent of Americans incorrectly believe that children end up in foster care because of their own juvenile delinquency – that they're not adopted because they're "too bad" or troublesome to deserve a loving family.
6. Fill in the Blank. Almost one in four adopted children live with a parent who is _____ or older.
7. Fill in the blank. As a culture, we place an almost magical value on the words "_____".
8. What are the three categories for telling a foster child you love them?
9. List how many Ceu's you need each year to keep your license current?
10. List two topics you would like to see more articles about.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

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(Continued from page 1)

6) Helping Birth Parents and Biological Family Members

The cycle of abuse and neglect is often a generational one. For many children in foster care, they come from a long cycle of family members placed in foster care before them. By showing compassion, by reaching out, and by helping birth parents of children in foster care, we not only help them we also help their children, as well.

7) Child sex trafficking

Commercial acts of sex being forced upon children as young as 10 years of age. Child sex trafficking is not only all around us, it is a business that is growing substantially, mainly due to the world of online technology. 300,000 children in the United States, alone, are victims of child sex trafficking. What society does not recognize, though, is that many of these children come from the foster care world. More advocates are needed to bring an end to form of modern day slavery for children.

8. Help for the Foster Parent

Foster parents often do not have all the resources or time they need to best help the children they are caring for from foster care. Whether it is by providing a cooked meal, helping out at Christmas time and birthdays, donating to a foster parent fund, raising money for summer camps and field trips for foster children, there are a number of ways people can help children in foster care where they live. As noted earlier, everyone can help a child in foster care in some way.

9. Faith Based Help

Today's faith based organizations have an opportunity to truly impact the foster care system in a positive way. Hosting a local foster parent association and support group is one such way a faith based organization can serve foster parents. Another way is serving as a location for family visitations. Faith based groups can provide a safe, consistent, warm, and inviting atmosphere for children and birth family members to meet during visitation sessions. Not only will children in foster care benefit, but foster parents and birth parents of the children will also benefit.

10. CASA Program

CASAs, or Court Appointed Special Advocates are volunteers who work with children in foster care as they advocate for their best interests in courtrooms and communities. These volunteer advocates offer judges the critical information they need to ensure that each child's rights and needs are being attended to while in foster care. Along with this, these volunteers often interact with children until they are placed in loving permanent homes. By becoming a CASA, one can

directly help a child in foster care.

With the New Year upon us, we have the opportunity to bring change the foster care system. We have the opportunity to bring healing to children who have very little. We have the opportunity to help children in need. Let us all make that a top resolution this year.

Find more at:

<http://www.drjohndegarmofostercare.com>

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https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-john-degarmo/10-new-year-resolutions-f_b_13603648.html

Being a Foster Child Taught Me Love #writeyourheartout - Sabrina's Story

By Jamie Finn

Sabrina e-mailed me a few weeks ago. She wrote just the kindest words, telling me she had been a foster child, thanking me for speaking up for foster children, thanking me for loving my own foster children. Her words were so encouraging and life-bringing that I asked her about her story. Her words were stunning and inspiring and reminded me, yet again, of why I'm a foster parent.

"Oh, you were adopted? I'm sorry I didn't know!"

Far too often there is a negative connotation hidden deep inside someone's voice when they find out I am adopted; as if being adopted is a bad thing and they need to feel sorry for me. But why are they sorry? I never understood why "foster care" and "adoption" had this eerie and peculiar reputation behind them, when those two things are responsible for the greatest thing that has ever happened to me.

My biological mother was 15 years old when she had me, and I was her second child. Sadly, she suffered from mental illness and fell into drug and alcohol addiction at a young age. My most distinct childhood memory I have is our Saturday trips to the park to pick up her "candy". I realized later that this "candy" was drugs.

My biological father was rarely present in my life because of his abusive tendencies. The only recollection I have of him involves blue and red flashing lights, police sirens, handcuffs, and lots of yelling. I have not heard from him or about him

until a few weeks ago when I heard that he had passed away from a drug overdose. The sad thing is that I pretty much shrugged my shoulders and walked into my next class, completely unfazed.

During my time as a foster child, I transitioned in and out of six different homes; each house, each family, and each experience completely different from the one before. When I entered my first foster home, I thought that the family's love and kindness towards one another was unusual, because I was never exposed to such behavior. I remember sitting on the porch during the summer months, watching my foster mom play outside in the yard with her children. I remember sitting there hugging my bruised, scraped knees wondering why the one person who was supposed to protect me and love me the most didn't. I remember sitting there thinking about why my mom was more concerned about where her next drug would come from before worrying about how she was going to feed her baby girl. At six years old, I had convinced myself that I was unwanted, unlovable, and unworthy of love and care.

I don't blame my biological mom for my story and the way I grew up. If anything, I thank her. Being in the foster care system and being adopted has brought me to the place I am today. Foster care has given me a second chance, a chance to live the life that God intended for me. Although each one of my foster homes was completely different from the one before, they all shared one thing in common. Love. Every new home that I walked into looked different. Each family had different values, interests, and traditions; however, they all were overflowing with and radiating love.

Looking back, I have so much to be thankful for. My foster dads, moms, brothers, and sisters made me realize that I am not "too anything" for a family. They showed me that even my most unforgiving habits could never disqualify me from being something worth loving. They contributed to unstitching the lies that had been woven into my identity. They showed me that I am worth a home. They showed me that I am not abandoned. They proved to me that my name is the answer to a mother and father's favorite gift. They taught me that I am valued. They taught me that I am a child of God and a daughter of the King.

The God who knit me together in my birth mother's womb is the same God who tells me that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Sure, my biological mother and father did not treat me or love me well. But, God revealed His love and Himself to me through other people who did. The foster families I've been in, the family I was adopted into, and the people I have encountered have made me realize that I was not a mistake and because of them I come unashamed.

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<http://www.fosterthefamilyblog.com>

What Are the Steps to Family Reunification Plan within Foster Care?

Basics to Family Reunification

by Carrie Craft

Those interested in becoming foster parents learn that a big part of their job as foster parents is to aid family reunification. There are numerous steps to a family reunification plan and each state, country, and foster care agency handles it differently. Here is a rough idea of some basics to family reunification. Again, your agency may differ.



1. Case plan goals, objections, and court orders. Most birth parents have numerous objectives that they must fulfill in order to have their children placed back within their home. The objectives, which are often court ordered, are also included within the case plan goal toward family reunification and may include the following:

- drug/alcohol classes or treatment, as needed
- random urine analysis if drugs and alcohol are an issue within the family
- maintain proper, safe housing
- maintain proper, legal employment
- keep a distance from past abusive people in their lives, i.e. ex-spouses or boy/girlfriends, friends, etc.
- attend needed classes, such as parenting, nutrition, or budgeting classes, etc.
- attend therapy
- take assessments as required
- attend and participate in all case plan meetings

1. Progression of visits. As time passes and the child remain in foster care, visits between the child and birth parents will steadily increase in frequency and moderation. It's not uncommon for visits to move from supervised, weekly visits to

monitored, weekly visits to unsupervised, weekly visits. Then they will progress from overnights and weekends to several days in a row. The visits are often increased as birth parents complete court orders, and have shown to be appropriate during previous supervised and monitored visits.

2. Court review of case plan goals. Court dates give the judge a chance to review the completion of court orders and read reports from the social workers, CASA, GAL, and foster parents on how the case is progressing and how the parents and children are handling the different transitions.

3. The role of the foster parent. As a foster parent, you help with family reunification through the following actions:

- role model appropriate parenting skills to the birth parents at visits, at teacher meetings, and doctor appointments,
- help the child manage behaviors through positive discipline
- help the child process grief and loss
- work with the child to meet educational and developmental milestones
- give feedback to the social workers
- transport the child to all doctor appointments, visits, and therapies
- be actively supportive of the reunification process.

1. Easing back into family reunification through visitation. The increase in visits leads into a natural transition of the child returning back home. This process may take several months.

2. Home checks with social workers and court officials. Once the child is back home with birth family a social worker, and/or sometimes court officials, check in monthly with the family for a set amount of time. For example, in Kansas, the family is monitored for 18 months after returning home. Again, each state, country, or agency may have different criteria and checkpoints once the family is reunified.

1. Case closed and family successfully reunified. At the end of the monitored time, the case is closed and social workers no longer visit the family.

The process of family reunification is a difficult and long journey for most families. There are numerous steps involved. Finding and keeping a job, attending visits and therapy, and maintaining sobriety is a lot to grasp at once. May every foster parent have a bit of compassion on the birth parent that is struggling with this process.

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<https://www.thespruce.com/family-reunification-within-foster-care-system-27779>

5 Reasons the Most Common Response to Foster Parents is the Most Painful.

By Liz Block

When I tell people I'm a foster parent, the most common and often well-intentioned response can also be the most painful.

I hear it all the time.

"I could never be a foster parent. I'd get too attached."

Usually I'm able to smile and respond with kindness, trying to gauge whether there's an honest curiosity to dialog or more of an anxious desire to switch topics.

Other times though. It stings.

As unintentional as the hurt might be, "I'd get too attached" hits most foster parents in a way few other responses do. Here's why.

- 1 – It doesn't recognize the realities of foster care. Sometimes kids hate being with us. They curse us and hit us. Other times we aren't equipped to keep them. Foster care is never easy and always complicated. Attachment comes, but it's very hard work. And something to be celebrated, not feared.
- 2 – It ignores how important attachment is for foster kids. Speaking about it so lightly as a bad thing is hard to hear. Many of these kids aren't attached to anyone because no one has ever attached to them. If kids don't learn how to attach, there are lifelong consequences. Trust and relationships will forever be a challenge.
- 3 – It implies that we don't get too attached. And do we ever! It hurts like hell when a child leaves our home. But we're so attached that we want the very best for them. Whether that's with us or not. Kids deserve that. To see and know they're worth attaching to.
- 4 – It doesn't consider the consequences. If foster parents let the ache of getting too attached keep them from becoming foster parents, where would these precious children go? Just as all of us have things we'd rather spend our money on than taxes, all of us have a responsibility to consider what would happen if none of us step forward.
- 5 – It doesn't consider the child. Focusing on the pain of our own attachment only looks at one side. The foster parent's. The grown adult with committed relationships, comfortable housing and ample food. We miss the child. The one

who actually needs love in the first place. I've had my fair share of practice responding, but sometimes it still hits a nerve. The days when I'm missing my foster son who always wanted to snuggle. Even when he was spitting angry at us. Or the nights when I'm wondering how my foster daughter is doing in her new home that cut off contact with us. Then it's hard to say the right thing. When my heart is stuck thinking of the precious children we've attached to.

But if I could, this is what I would say.

"Go ahead. Get too attached. It's exactly what kids need."

Reprinted with permission from: <http://fosteringreal.com>

Understanding Reactive Attachment Disorder

By: Danielle Helzer



Our kids (both adopted from foster care) have Reactive Attachment Disorder. Kids with RAD engage in intense power struggles with their caregivers because they have learned their previous caregivers didn't do a good job of meeting their needs.

For our kids, here's what these power struggles look like: If we give our kids a two-step instruction, they do the second step before they do the first step. If we ask them to put on their coat before school, they'll put on their backpack instead. I laid out a lightweight coat for my daughter last week during our 50-60 degree weather streak; she asked for a warmer one.

I explained why we were wearing our spring coats, and she insisted she wear her winter coat throughout the week.

If we issue a consequence to our kids, they will yell that we are mean and scream and kick for sometimes up to an hour. When I ask J to walk, he runs. When I ask K to run, she walks. Our daughter has to know everything that is going on: what we are doing each day, when we are leaving, when we are coming home, what we are eating, etc. Our son "spies" on my husband and me when we're having conversations—he simply cannot go play while the two of us talk. Sometimes our daughter even refuses to complete basic hygiene tasks (hand-washing, wiping after pottyting, showering, etc).

In therapy we've been working on trust—so, the therapist blindfolds the kids and has one of us lead the child around the office. Immediately, their arms and hands begin to feel for something familiar. They stick out a foot and feel around before taking a step. A nervous giggle sometimes turns into out of control laughing. Our kids fight for control in nearly every situation.

Conversely, they are totally sweet and compliant around strangers or those who they don't have a deep relationship with because they've learned how to "work a crowd." In the past they've used others to get what they need: food, attention, hugs, diaper changes, etc. K demonstrates this by giving lots of hugs and wanting to be right next to others (teachers, day care staff, relatives) at all times. She'll play with their hair, touch their jewelry, compliment them on their clothes/house/hair/etc.

J exercises perfect compliance in new situations with new people. At every school he's ever attended, he's gone three months with no behavioral incidents. After three months when he sees he's not going anywhere, the deal is off. This year the principal and teachers were so concerned and emailed us multiple times in October when J let his guard down; I explained that this is the real J—that now he feels safe at school and knows he's not going anywhere...I'm sure they thought I was a nut-bag.

This morning on the way to school J argued with me about something; I replied by saying, "Thank you for letting me know that we still need to practice being compliant" (a phrase our therapist has instructed us to use). J retorted with a top-of-his-lungs scream, throwing his backpack at me, yelling I was mean, and kicking the back of seat until we arrived at school. While at a stop light, I reached behind me and took his shoes off so he didn't damage my car. He was still out of control when the bell rang, so I scooped him out of the car—shoeless—and carried him into school. The principal, the secretary, and a handful of kids stared, mouths open. I sat him down in the

front foyer and we practiced following instructions until he was ready to go to school...late for the fifth time this year thanks to these morning power struggles.

Admittedly: I am EXHAUSTED. The mental effort and physical restraint it takes to parent my children is leaving me feeling like an overused simile. My body aches on a regular basis. My nerves are shot. Taking my kids both into public places alone is my nightmare because it inevitably elicits judgmental stares from strangers when I use the integrative parenting techniques suggested by our therapist and RAD literature.

And still, I love them. I love them so much that I'll quit my full-time job (that I love) to be more free to take them to counseling and occupational therapy and psychiatry appointments or just to run to school to eat lunch with them. I love them so much that I'll fight my instinct to spank them when they're defiant because physical consequences don't work for RAD kids. I love them so much that I'll drag all of us to a store in the evening so we can practice being appropriate while I shop. I love them so much that I'll bypass reading my new memoir to read a book on parenting kids with attachment trauma.

I love them so much that I'll try to ignore the judgmental stares and comments from people who have no clue what it's like to parent my children. I will love them through their tantrums—I'll pop in my ear plugs and rub their back while they scream and kick out all their mad. Parenting kids with attachment trauma is tough work...so find a foster or a foster-adoptive parent and give them a hug, withhold advice (especially if you're not or have ever been a foster parent), and tell them they're doing a good job because they need this encouragement so desperately.

Reprinted with permission from:

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/danielle-helzer/understanding-reactive-at_b_9541622.html

"I love them so much that I'll try to ignore the judgmental stares and comments from people who have no clue what it's like to parent my children."

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. 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

Robbi Blume (FACES): 402-853-1091

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: 308-672-3658.
Famer's State Bank Building, 1320 W. 3rd St, entrance in rear.
6:00-7:30 p.m.
January 18, February 15, March 15, April 19, May 17, 2018
- **Scottsbluff Support Group:** Meets the second Tuesday of the month. Registration is required.
Contact Jolie Camden to register: 308-672-3658.
Regional West Medical Center, in South Plaza Room 1204.
6:00-7:30 p.m.
January 9, February 13, March 13, April 10, May 8, 2018
- **Chadron Support Group:** Registration is required.
Contact Jolie Camden to register: 308-672-3658.
The Refuge, 132 W 3rd Street.
6:00-7:30 p.m.
January 5, February 6, March 6, April 3, May 1, 2018
- **Columbus Support Group:** Meets the second Tuesday of the month (except July and December). Childcare available.
Contact Tammy Welker at: 402-989-2197.
(Thank you Building Blocks and Behavioral Health Specialists for providing childcare!).
Peace Lutheran Church, 2720 28th St.
7:00-8:30 p.m.
January 9, February 13, March 13, April 10, May 8, 2018

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

- **FACES:** OnlineSupportGroup: Every Tuesday 9:00-10:00 p.m. CT Contact Felicia at Felicia@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.
Children welcome to attend with parents.
Newman United Methodist Church, 2242 R Street, Lincoln. 7:00-8:30 pm
Contact the NFAPA office to register for Family Events or any questions. 402-476-2273
For more info: <https://www.facebook.com/colorlineslincoln/>
January 22, February 26, March 26, April 23, 2018

Be sure to mark your calendars! If you have a topic you want discussed, please contact the Resource Family Consultant for that group.

Waiting for a Forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.



Names:
Madison
17 years old

Described as energetic, fun and a girly-girl, Madison can be shy at first, but quickly warms up and will show you her outgoing side. Madison stays very busy playing volleyball,

basketball and participating in dance. She is artistic and enjoys singing, drawing and writing. Madison enjoys fashion and loves to spend time shopping so she can add to her wardrobe. Madison is an advocate for herself, thrives off positive reinforcement and likes to participate in making decisions about her future. Madison is excited to pursue her interest in Psychology after she graduates high school.

Name:
Nariilah
11 years old

Charming and smart, Nariiah is very personable and attentive to details. She loves to help in the kitchen and enjoys family dinners. Nariiah takes pride in being creative and unique. She loves doing art projects and dancing as ways to express herself. Nariiah has lots of energy and enjoys playing outside with her friends, but also loves to go to the salon and get her nails done. Nariiah would do well with a family that is active and flexible.

Nariiah takes pride in being creative and unique. She loves doing art projects and dancing as ways to express herself. Nariiah has lots of energy and enjoys playing outside with her friends, but also loves to go to the salon and get her nails done. Nariiah would do well with a family that is active and flexible.

Connections: Nariiah is very bonded to her siblings and will need support with maintaining her relationships with them.



Membership Drive

The Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association empowers, supports, and advocates for Nebraska families by promoting safety, permanency, and well-being of our children. Your membership supports the important mission of NFAPA. There are several membership levels to accommodate everyone in the foster care, adoptive care, and child welfare community.

NFAPA offers four annual membership levels; Single Family (\$25), Family (\$35), Supporting (\$75) and Organization (\$150). In order to enrich NFAPA's mission, we are offering a new membership program – Friends of NFAPA. This membership level is billed \$5 monthly.

To join, simply mail in the membership form included in this newsletter or visit www.nfapa.org. Your membership will ensure that Nebraska's most vulnerable children will have their greatest chance at success!

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

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

Phone: 402-504-3673

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)
- 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. Please contact Felicia at 402-476-2273 with questions.

Gone

By Liz Block

Our precious Big D is gone. After living life together for seventeen months, gone.

Most days it feels surreal. I wonder if he's really gone. Or if he was ever really here. Knowing the truth, but feeling a variation of it.

I feel like it can't be true because I'm not yet devastated. And every other time I've said goodbye to a foster child, it's been devastating.

I miss Big D every day. I miss him asking if we could stop at the corner store on the way to school. I miss finding his grin and showing him mine when we saw each other at school pick-up. I miss cooking, dancing, singing, snuggling, teasing, laughing together. I always will.

He was my son. But he was never really mine.

And he really isn't now.

Foster care isn't about getting kids for my family, for me. It's about giving kids a family. Giving kids me. For as long as they need.

And Big D doesn't anymore. He's safe with his dad. Cooking, dancing, singing, snuggling teasing, laughing with his family.

He's there. With them. Home.

That's the point. And I'm finally starting to get it.

Getting it doesn't mean the missing goes away. Some days are and will be harder and heavier than others. All the feelings are still real and valid and okay.

For me, it simply means that the missing carries hope.



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<http://fosteringreal.com>



If you Give a Foster Family a Chicken Dinner

By Maralee Bradley

If you give a foster family a chicken dinner,
They might have extra time to spend with their foster child.
When they have extra time to spend with their foster child,
They'll spend it taking a walk, looking at flowers.
When they spend it on a walk looking at flowers,
They learn more about each other because they aren't feeling stressed by dinner prep.

When they learn more about each other because they aren't feeling stressed,

They are able to work on forming a healthy attachment.

If they're able to work on forming a healthy attachment,

They're creating a foundation for lifelong relational health.

If they're creating a foundation for lifelong relational health,

Sometimes it feels too risky and the foster child will push them away.

When it feels too risky and the foster child pushes them away,

The foster parent will need to work through their own feelings of rejection and lovingly draw closer to the child.

When the foster parent can lovingly draw closer to the child, the child may realize they are committed even when things are tough.

If the foster child realizes the foster parent is committed, they may feel safe enough to open up.

When the foster child feels safe enough to open up, the foster parent can respond with empathy and can help meet their physical needs.

When a foster parent responds with empathy and offers to meet their physical needs, the child may feel ready to eat.

And when the foster child feels ready to eat, she may ask for a chicken dinner.

Being a foster parent is one way to help a foster child, but it isn't the only way. This work takes a team approach and sometimes the best thing you can do is bring dinner. You may wonder how dinner helps, other than just the physical

provision of food, but the time you invest in making that meal is time that foster parents can invest in relationship building with the child. There are so many other examples— bringing diapers, having groceries delivered, praying for the child and family, dropping off coffee for an exhausted mom, taking their bio or adopted kids on a fun adventure so the focus can be on the foster child, providing childcare so the family can go to court.

I think there is a wrong impression that doing something for foster kids requires actually being the one to invest in the foster kid. What many of us know is that when you invest in the foster FAMILY or the foster PARENTS you are actually doing the best thing possible for the foster child. They need to bond with those parents. They need to feel safe and loved

by consistent adults who can provide nurture, structure and stability for them. They don't need a rotating parade of adults in and out of their lives to say nice things to them. When you can build into the foster parents, the foster child will reap the rewards.

These kids need foster parents who don't burnout. They need experienced foster parents who

have learned how to work with the system, have successfully built relationships with biological families, and have gained parenting wisdom by working with kids from trauma. Having an involved and educated support structure is one way we can prevent burnout in our foster families. If you are part of that support structure, take pride in what you're doing! Claim it. Tell other people how you are involved in the work of foster care by bringing meals, showing up with emergency pacifiers when the brand the family had on hand wasn't working, and helping facilitate date nights for the foster parents (gift cards they can use for a date night in after the kids have gone to bed is a great way to handle it.).

We recently attended a picnic thrown by a local church for foster families with our agency. The dinner was great, but what was even better was being able to just sit with other families who understand what we're going through. The foster, adopted and bio kids were able to play with other foster, adopted and bio kids. This is so beautifully normalizing for our kids. While the church who provided the food may have thought they were just providing a meal, it was SO MUCH MORE than that for



the families involved. It was a rare opportunity to relax with people who know our struggles and joys.

We need everybody to show up for these kids. Think about your unique gifts and passions and how you can use them for foster kids (make a blanket! paint a nursery! take a family photo! give guitar lessons!). Everybody can do something and maybe what you can do is make a chicken dinner.

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<http://www.amusingmaralee.com>*

Tell Your Foster Child You Love Them (even if you aren't sure)

by Maralee Bradley

As a culture, we place an almost magical value on the words "I love you." They are words that should not be said until you REALLY mean them. . . whatever that means to you. They are words that cement a relationship and imply commitment. But we also use those words incredibly flippantly. I love that hamburger. I love this show. I'm in love with my new sandals. The words "I love you" can mean everything and nothing depending on the context. We feel free to express our love for things or celebrities we'll never meet or vacation locations, but when it comes to people in our lives we can be much more cautious.

Because we place so much value on saying "I love you" only when we mean it and at the right time, it can feel tricky to decide when to tell your foster child you love them. I think the concerns about doing it break down into three categories: concern for the child's heart, respect for the biological family, and self-protection.

This child is likely a temporary addition to your family. It can feel unkind to tell a child we love them if they are just going to be with us for a short time. We don't want them to think people who love them will always leave them. We're worried about the message that sends. Is telling them we love them a promise we're making that we know we can't keep? Will we break their hearts when it's time for them to go? Will the pain be harder and deeper because we told them we loved them and now we're abandoning them?

And what about the family they came from? Do we put the child in an awkward position when we tell them we love them? We don't want them to feel pressured into responding that they love us too if that makes them feel disloyal to their family. We worry that if the parents knew we loved their child, they might feel hurt. This is an awkward dance of wanting to support the family, but also connecting with their child and loving them as our own.

But I think the biggest concern is really for ourselves. If I say out loud that I love this child, I'm admitting this situation has the power to break my heart. If my friends and family know I love this child, they'll begin to fear for me and the heartache that's coming and they may say unkind things about a biological family they know little about. If I love this child, I may move from being an unbiased participant in the process to a passionate advocate. Love always brings with it the potential for pain and in foster care it doesn't just feel like potential, it feels like a foregone conclusion.

There is also a chance we may not "love" this child the way we imagined we would. Foster kids are like all kids- they can be annoying, needy, sassy, manipulative, and whiney. And that's the best case scenario. Because of the trauma they've experienced they can have much deeper wounds and much greater walls than your average kid. The coping skills they learned in an unhealthy environment can make it tough for them to acclimate to a healthy one. Sometimes it isn't that you don't want to tell them you love them, the reality is you don't actually love them. . . at least not yet.

Foster Parent, I have been there.

My first introduction to loving someone else's child was through group home work with primarily teenage boys. We found some kids we instantly connected with in spite of their difficult behaviors and some kids were more of a challenge. For the children that were easy for me to love, it was easy for me to tell them I loved them. Although it felt awkward at first, I knew it was true and it was good for them to hear it. For the kids I had a harder time with, I found myself withholding.

One night I was going room to room, saying goodnight to our boys. As I closed the door to the room of one of our older and harder to deal with boys, I realized I didn't say "I love you" to him. I hadn't felt guilty about that before because it didn't feel authentic for me to say it. But that night I stopped and put myself in the position of that young man. And I realized I was being a jerk.

I grew up in a home where I never went a day in my life without hearing that I was loved. It may have been an explicit "I love you" or in more subtle ways- a kiss on the head, a pat on the back, encouraging words about something I was working on or just a loving presence next to me on the couch while I read. I never doubted that I was a loved person and worthy of love. This has had a tremendous impact on who I am as an adult. It has given me the ability to be confident in myself and to trust others. These are necessary skills for making good life decisions.

But what about this boy in my home? Did he grow up in a home where someone made sure he always knew he was loved? And even if he had, that role had now been delegated to me. His mother wasn't calling him daily to say those words to him. It was painful to me to realize if I didn't tell him he was loved, he would not hear it from anyone. I couldn't allow that to happen to a child in my care. I determined that day any child

in my home would hear they were loved and would know they were loved as much as I could help it.

I believe at some point whether you actually have feelings of love about the child becomes irrelevant. Children need to be loved. You are doing love for them even if you don't feel it. You are changing diapers or making lunches or helping with homework or braiding hair or sitting with them in the doctor's office. That is love even when you feel frustrated or discouraged in your heart.

Maybe this child will be hurt when they leave, but I don't believe not telling them they are loved will make the pain any less. Maybe their biological family will be upset, but I don't think it's right to withhold love from a child to please their family. Maybe you're concerned about how your heart will break if you admit you love this child. But that's why we're here– to let our hearts break so these little hearts can heal.

If you feel uncomfortable saying the words "I love you" to your foster child, find other ways to be sure they know they are loved. I have whispered over babies, "Mama loves you." because that is true in every sense– both their biological Mama and their foster Mama love them. I have said, "You are so loved" to children who have family that love them even if I don't feel that love yet. I have told children "You are lovable. You are worth loving." because that is true of EVERY child regardless of whether I feel that love yet or not. And most importantly, I remind kids that God loves them. I tell them that part of the reason I know God loves them is that he has put a little bit of His great love for them in my heart, too.

When it comes to love and these precious kids, I believe we can fake it until we make it. Do love, be love, speak love and you will eventually feel love. And if you don't feel it, that doesn't necessarily mean it isn't there. Love is so much more than warm feelings or intense positive emotions. Don't let a child in your home go a day without knowing they are loved, even if you aren't sure how you feel. A child who feels confident they are loved and worth loving is ultimately a child who is much easier to love.

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Five Myths About Foster Care Adoption

By Rita Soronen, President & CEO of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Lose 10 pounds. Read a book a week. Unplug from technology an hour a day.

We all start a new year off optimistically, but too often we fall back into our old routines because our goals just weren't

realistic. This year, I challenge you to add a simple resolution that won't take much time, but will have a significant impact on children across the country: Help me correct the misperceptions about foster care adoption.

The foster care system provides an indispensable refuge for the more than 400,000 children who've been removed from unsafe homes, abusive parents, and other unhealthy environments, more than 100,000 of whom are waiting to be adopted. But foster care isn't meant to be a permanent place for these children. Unfortunately, for some people who could provide loving and supportive homes as foster or adoptive parents to deserving children, a number of common myths and inaccuracies can make the prospect of foster care adoption more intimidating than it should be. We all have a role we can play to help correct these misperceptions and make foster care adoption less daunting.

So as we gather with friends and family during the new year, let's take a minute to correct some of these common misperceptions. You never know the lives it may change.

1.) Children end up in foster care because of their own juvenile delinquency.

Nearly half of Americans incorrectly believe that children end up in foster care because of their own juvenile delinquency – that they're not adopted because they're "too bad" or troublesome to deserve a loving family. In actuality, these children enter the system due to parental abuse or neglect, not through any fault of their own.

And for the thousands of children who age out of foster care every year, they're more likely to continue to face hardship, such as homelessness, difficulty paying bills or pregnancy at a young age. These children are also less likely to graduate from college, which has a lasting negative economic impact on their lives.

However, their greatest loss is missing out on a family who helps support them through tough times and who guides them as they grow. No child is unadoptable, they just aren't adopted. These children – whether they're 18 months old or 18 years old – all need loving and supportive families.

2.) Adoptive parents need to be heterosexual, married couples.

Families who adopt are as unique and diverse as the children in their care, and children in foster care don't need to wait for some specific notion of family. Families come in all shapes and sizes, with 28 percent of adoptive children living in single parent homes. You don't need to own your own home, have children already, be young, wealthy, or a stay-at-home parent. These children simply need loving individuals in their lives

who are willing to meet the challenges of parenting, and are willing to make a lifetime commitment to caring for and nurturing them.

3.) Adoptive parents need to be under 50 years old.

There is no ideal age to become an adoptive parent. Almost one in four adopted children live with a parent who is 55 years or older. It doesn't matter if adoptive parents already have children, or have never had children. What matters is their willingness to commit to parenthood.

4.) A child's biological parent can "re-claim" them.

Almost half of people considering foster care adoption incorrectly believe that a child's biological parent can regain custody post-adoption. Biological parents have no way of regaining custody of a child once their parental rights are terminated. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities and protections as parents whose children were born to them. This also means children who have been adopted have all the emotional, social, legal, and familial benefits of biological children.

5.) Foster care adoption is expensive.

Foster care adoption is not expensive; in fact, it can cost little to nothing. Foster care adoption costs can range from \$0 to \$2,500, depending on the type of adoption; the agency through which you work; the state in which you adopt; travel fees; and attorney fees. While you do need to be financially stable to adopt, you do not need to be wealthy. Subsidies are often available when adopting, there are adoption tax benefits, and many employers also offer adoption benefits.

Children in foster care aren't unadoptable, they just aren't adopted. Every one of us can work to end the myth that some children are too troublesome to deserve a family, by helping correct some of these misperceptions that our friends, family and community members may have about foster care adoption.

This year, make the resolution to correct the myths about foster care adoption. A simple conversation could be all that it takes for a child to find a loving family and permanent home.

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<https://davethomasfoundation.org/rita/five-myths-about-foster-care-adoption/>

Hard Things

By Therapist Mom

There are things that happen within the privacy of a home that we never learn about. The private family struggles that can be hard to offer as you know you haven't really made it out of the woods, and yet you have something to say about where you are standing in this moment. Here is what I want to say to anyone who has an interest in hearing from a family standing in the gap of foster care and trying really hard to do something good. Kind. Just.

Two weeks ago our boys' older siblings moved in for an emergency placement for the weekend. It was a holiday weekend. The plan had long been for them to move from their previous foster home to a new home and there was a gap. We all knew this was coming for a month at least. Last minute placements slipped through the system's fingers and it was Friday at 3:30pm before a 3 day weekend and our big brother and sister had nowhere to go. I called The Artist to talk about our offering to be a home "only for the weekend, Tuesday is our hard limit, no excuses." Well, Tuesday turned into two weeks which is turning into a month. The condensed version is this: two beautiful kids who share blood and history with my boys need a home to adopt them and a family to love them forever. I know that home cannot be with us. The current plan is to search intensely for a pre-adoptive home for big brother and sister, and we are holding onto them while this process happens. In my heart I know the work of building a forever family does not happen on timelines, and no one involved wishes to compromise under deadlines and pressure. And yet, here we are. It's a funny thing to offer yourself into a situation which requires immeasurable compromise, discomfort, uncertainty and genuine joy.

When we said yes to being a more permanent-temporary home I knew I was saying yes to hope and opportunity for the older two kiddos. I will stand tall and say this is a good thing to do. I know it is. They deserve opportunities, love, and dedication in a way the foster care system has not offered them yet. In the same breath I will also say we made a choice to give our boys less of what they have come to know and rely on in having attuned, present adults, and introduce chaos, traumatic reminders and aggression into our home. And this is not something we took lightly. Tiny has only conscious memory of a home with his two Moms and his toddler brother - he feels rhythmic, connected. He does all those wonderful textbook things babies should do; he makes faces that mirror mine, he catches my eye in any uncertain event and with my smile and head nod he gently moves forward. He sleeps in his crib (sometimes) and when he is teething or sick sleeping next to a Mom allows him to rest easier. The gift of good enough attachment here helps us immeasurably as Mamas. My sweet Mr. T is funny, kind and a sensitive soul. Mr. T has disorganized and troubling memories that surface mostly as

night terrors, generalized anxiety and pretty intense sensory disorganization. We had a family rhythm, a bedtime routine, that was finely honed over the course of a year and a half that finally, FINALLY, allowed my toddler boy to sleep beyond 2 hours at a time. And it's ridiculously elaborate: dimmer switches throughout the whole house, tubby time, books, yoga, guided visualization, lavender essential oil spray around his room, weighted blankets and chew toys. It's kind of amazing I can remember it all. And now we have big kids with very different histories, who have gotten so little in their lives they are hungry for it all. And their needs and basic household needs and Moms' needs have shot this meditation-on-relaxing bedtime to hell. It would be dishonest to say this is nothing but a fun crazy, hectic time of wild kid energy. Mr. T feels unsure of his place now I think, and we have tightened our routine back down to make sure he is still getting as much from us as he possibly can, but it's admittedly less.

The battle for adult attention in our home is terrifically hard for the Moms to balance. I feel like I have three 3 year olds, and a 21 month old. No one can toilet or bathe independently. Which seems like not really a big deal until you do the math on 4 kids and how many times they pee and poop a day. All four of my kids need significant help eating and need outfit changes after almost every meal. Riding in cars is t o u g h. If I were a betting Mama I would say a lot of their history involved being strapped into strollers/car seats/something as being restrained in car seats was traumatic for all of us on the first long car trip. The feeling I experience most during the day is a wish to unzip myself and be in four places at once. Everyone needs something most of the time, so I'm having to tally up who gets attended to first, which isn't something I really had to do before and it feels awful to know I'm sometimes choosing to let our boys wait it out and watch other kids get picked over them. Not a big deal, many would say. Maybe even waiting to get your needs met builds character and patience? Totally, I would say. So long as those kids waiting it out have gotten enough from the people they need it from and have the internal resources to feel loved and secure even while waiting it out. Not quite the situation I have in my house. Most of my day is spent knowing we are doing a good thing in helping our biggest kiddos learn how to be in a family, how to share, how to not hurt someone else's body when you're upset, how to accept redirection and limits. How to melt down and get back on track when you're ready, and better than that let your grown up step back into it with you as you move forward. These are things kids need to know how to do to develop in a good enough way. These are things that can only help them do the work of building a family when they are able to connect with the adults who will raise them forever. I would say that the biggest kiddos in my home have been doing amazingly well over the past few weeks. Calming bodies and voices, tolerating limits (I mean, real talk, some limits), not hurting anyone else and not raging and scaring the little kids so many times a day. And the little

markers: their skin is not as chronically dry or showing signs of eczema, they're eating well (two more for the leafy green lyfe), their nails and hair look attended to. The largest reason I think they are really launching here though is probably the most complicated.

Connection, self-worth, trust - these are tricky things to rebuild when you come from a hard place. I'm a broken record here, but these are the things you heal over a lifetime in different ways, and I'll just say again I think this is heart-breaking and beautiful work. Really, I do. And I hope we are laying small stones in their path to help them as they grow. But the bigger reason they are thriving is that they are getting all the more superficial things kids like and that's super exciting. New clothes! They came with only clothes for the first weekend. Backpacks, lunch boxes! Books! Games! Chew toys! Beach trips and museums and water parks! This stuff is totally fun and worth being excited over. And eventually the new clothes will stop when they have enough to get by with, and the trips won't feel so novel or as exciting because that is what happens when things become routine or predictable. And that is when we will really hit the floor. Some folks call this the honeymoon, and I think that's not precisely right as the kids have known us for over a year and we have lots of expectations and family rules around language and kindness. This is more the complicated work of rebuilding a heart from the outside in, if that makes sense. A small example: I brought home a Dino lunchbox from Target for our biggest brother, nothing fancy it was like \$4. When I showed it to him to explain how we'll pack his lunch tomorrow he said, "I just love you so much! I love you!" And here is where I say "Oh my gosh, you're so happy! I'm glad you're happy, happy feels good! And I love you too that's why I read books, and listen to all the reasons you are mad or frustrated. This is happiness you have something new, and that's so great!" Getting things is not love. Nice shoes and embroidered backpacks, those are not love, those are things. It's really fucking hard to not confuse this all when you've gotten so little. And now they are in the getting things phase, because that is how it goes at first. And eventually it will be the "I want more/better/RIGHT NOW" phase because that is what happens when you start getting things before you know how to use relationships. It's not their fault, kids come by this honestly. Many, many adults can relate. All that to say, our biggest kids are seeming really feel happy here. Biggest brother (who is 5) asked me yesterday if I could get a rocket and take him to the moon on Sunday, he thinks this is a totally plausible thing I could do for him. It's completely adorable, and at the same time causes my heart to hurt. That is the level of excitement and novelty he has about the family adventures we take now. Family adventures our boys think are kind of mundane or typical. When you've lived through terrible trauma, you will do amazing in certain places, before you really struggle everywhere. That is the way healing from complex trauma happens. When you expect

this linear trajectory because it's going so good, it's a set up for everyone. And we know this. And we knew this when we said yes. So right now we are doing amazing in places with our biggest kiddos. At the same time our boys are struggling with sharing, struggling to get so much less of us, struggling witnessing scary behavior and language they're not used to. And I knew all of this when we said yes.

In the end the biggest reason I wanted to say yes to being a home for our biggest kiddos was that I wanted our boys to know that our family did a really hard thing, all together, when it mattered, because it was the right thing to do. And that in essence this is the way we write our family story. I wanted them to grow up knowing we said "yes" fully aware it was going to require painful growth on all our parts, and also knowing we stood beside their brother and sister at a time when they needed love and holding. Building a family is such personal and messy work. Beautiful work. Hard work. I can't even begin to imagine what happens next for us all. I just believe we as Moms, and we as a family, are doing the hard work that comes along with doing a good thing together.

-Foster Mom (therapist)

About Us:

We were emergency foster parents focused on reunification & providing short-term options for kids in care until we got a phone call for a tiny, 6 week old baby boy. 2 weeks later, we received a 2nd call for his 2 year old brother. Just as quickly we entered the world of adopting transracially from foster care. That was 3 years ago. We recently adopted the boys' big sister and are now a family of 5.

We are visual storytellers, parents and educators writing from the intersections of transracial adoption, foster care and LGBT parenting.

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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>

Upcoming Training

Facilitated by the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

The Kinship Connection

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

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

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Lincoln

Tuesday, January 30, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Omaha

Saturday, February 3, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Hastings

Saturday, February 17, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Gothenburg

Saturday, February 17, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Omaha

Saturday, March 3, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Grand Island

Monday, March 19, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Omaha

Saturday, March 24, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: North Platte

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

from 9 am – 4 pm: Lincoln

Registration is required.

Register online:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KinshipRegistration2018>

These informational classes are for Relative & Kinship families who have not taken pre-service classes to be licensed foster parents.



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- 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
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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): _____

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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.

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