

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

January/February 2017

N F A P A

Five Myths About Foster Care Adoption

Rita Soronen, President and CEO, 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.

(Continued on page 3)

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your Foster Parent Credits While Getting the Chance to win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions from this newsletter 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, send the questionnaire from the newsletter to the NFAPA office at 2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C, Lincoln, NE, print off this questionnaire from our website, www.nfapa.org (under newsletters) or you can do the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JanuaryFebruary2017>. 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. True or False. Earning your kid's trust is far more important than your ability to quickly modify a behavior.
2. Fill in the blank. So remember, how you respond to your own _____ is as important as any reaction that you may show to your child.
3. True or False. Being told that you will be kept safe by the person you love the most is a powerful affirmation.
4. True or False. Collecting evidence to support or refute your child's reasons for anxiety helps your children see if their worries are based on fact.
5. True or False. Trust is at the heart of all healthy relationships.
6. Fill in the blanks. Their basic needs for _____, _____, _____ and _____ were not met, or were only met in haphazard and anxiety producing ways.
7. True or False. We must confront not only our child's past trauma, but our own as well.
8. Fill in the blank. Almost _____ of people considering foster care adoption incorrectly believe that a child's biological parent can regain custody post-adoption.
9. True or False. Children end up in foster care because of their own juvenile delinquency.
10. Fill in the blanks. We learn _____ or mistrust, that the world is a _____ or a dangerous place, and how to relate to others based on those primal connections.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Families First Newsletter Issue: January/February 2017

(Continued from page 1)

What matters is their willingness to commit to parenthood.

4.) A child's biological parent can "reclaim" 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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Save the Date for Foster Parent Recognition

May is National Foster Care Month. Each year, the Governor holds a ceremony proclaiming May Foster Care Month in Nebraska. The Proclamation will be held on May 10th, 2017. In conjunction with this event NFAPA would like honor foster parents. Do you know a foster family that deserves a special recognition? Please send their name(s), contact information and a brief description of how this family has provided extraordinary care to children in need. Nominations can be sent to: Nichollette@nfapa.org



10 Things Your Child's Therapist Wish You Knew During Therapy and Beyond

Whitney Herrmann, MA, NCC, LPC

You know it is time. Your child's behavior has now reached a point where they would benefit from bringing in outside help. However, the process of deciding who to invite into your son or daughter's life can be daunting at such a vulnerable time. You want the therapist to connect to your teen but also for him or her to be someone you trust. Your child finally makes a connection with a therapist and is starting to open up. But have you ever wondered what your therapist is thinking? Here is a list of the top 10 things your teen's therapist wish you knew:

1. Trust that you are the expert on your kid

A good therapist knows not to base his or her entire perspective on that of a teen. The therapist must work hard to develop a strong relationship with your child; however, they must also consider the opinions and viewpoints of the parents in order to more fully understand the situation at hand. It can be helpful to use the analogy of a CEO and his board to further illustrate the importance of your role. Until the late teen years, God has entrusted you to be the CEO of your child's company. You are inviting us, the therapist, in as consultants. We should earn your respect and trust, bringing the latest research on behavior modification. However, your experience means you will always be the expert on your child. Use those God given instincts to speak confidently with the therapist you are choosing to serve on the board. You will have a relationship with your child far after the therapist comes and goes, so keep your seat at the table and find counselors that instinctually and actively acknowledge your worth

2. Showing empathy is not the same thing as approval

As a therapist, we practice for years what is called Reflective Listening. It is a powerful technique that shows the client they are not only being heard, but are understood. So often parents get overwhelmed with the enormous task of keeping a teen safe that moms and dads forget to take the time to help his or her child know they are being heard. Parents can start simply by beginning sentences with, "I hear that you are frustrated" or "You sound overwhelmed." It is natural for the parent to want to relieve pressure and solve problems; however, if the child feels deeply understood first, they can often come to their own sound conclusions. The parents' efforts in helping their children understand both the root of their issue and their reactions can be worth every bit of effort.

3. Negotiate parenting issues and decisions with your partner behind closed doors

Parenting will only be as effective as the united front in which the structure is presented. Many times with children, it feels as if consequences need to be administered quickly. Teens are successful at communicating urgency in many situations and can make you feel you must tell them what will occur to alleviate his or her anxiety. However, if you speak too quickly and then change your mind later, the teen will know the doors are open to negotiations. Behaviors usually continue because they are allowed. If you find your teen raging for days after a consequence has been administered, evaluate your consistency. Taking a few hours behind closed doors to consult with your partner regarding realistic consequences that can be consistently administered and then delivering them as a united team will help to slow down the negotiations and make for a more peaceful home.

4. If all else fails, remember that you are trying and in the end, that matters

A child can be so angry with his or her parent and yet as soon as the parent leaves the room, the teen speaks of how important they are to them. There is no bigger punching bag in life than a parent and a wise mother or father knows they will receive hits if they want to stay on the team. This does not mean a parent has to tolerate disrespect; it does mean, however, that they will not always believe the teen's initial reaction. Parents can partner with the therapist to investigate the explosive reactions to reveal the deeper currents of their child's heart.

5. See difference in parenting styles within the marriage as casting a larger, more effective net

So often, one parent is high warmth and the other is high structure. Parents can engage in bitter arguments regarding which parent is serving the child's needs more effectively. However, a child being well rounded, raised by a variety of perspectives is the key to emotional health. Let your partner be different than you. Yes, consistency reigns supreme; however, implementing structure is simply style and multiple styles can serve your teen well in the long run. Before you criticize your spouse's parenting, consider if it is actually damaging or if it is simply different than yours

6. You can only take your child as far as you have allowed yourself to go

This is the brutal reality to therapy and parenting – we can only take those following us down the paths we have had the courage to walk. Anxiety, depression and self-esteem are highly contagious and often times the parent's mental health, happiness and wellbeing must be considered when teaching a teen how to heal

themselves. Remember, your child is watching and if you are not kind and truthful with yourself, it is very difficult for the therapist to teach your child to love and be honest with themselves.

7. There is no bigger self-esteem booster than “What do you think you should do about that?”

Most children have some sense of self-esteem in the early years. It is why a child will sing at the top of his or her lungs in the grocery store. However, many parents watch helplessly as their child loses confidence starting as early as elementary school. Self-esteem is a deeply complicated psychology built on years of investment into your child's sense of self. Simply asking your child what they believe they should do or how they can make a situation better lets them know you believe in his or her ability to think it through. This endorsement will be deeply felt and eventually appreciated by each teen.

8. Surround yourself with encouragers, and no, it cannot be your kids

Any parent willing to invest the time, finances and vulnerability of bringing a child into therapy is a parent invested in seeing that child heal and grow. Every parent can tell you ten things they wished they were doing differently; however, they cannot tell you three strengths they are bringing to their child. Parenting is a long distance run and those who finish strong will be the ones that keep investing in their self-care accounts, knowing the withdrawals will be deep. Hold onto friendships, professionals and teammates that encourage and remind you of your unique contributions to your child's life.

9. Earning your kid's trust is far more important than your ability to quickly modify a behavior

There is far more to earning a child's trust than simply providing for his or her needs. Many times parents do not know the core contributing factors to their child's behaviors because the teen does not feel they will understand. It is tempting to try and relate by telling the teen stories of your youth but teens do not start listening to parents simply because they have relevant experience. It is only through empathy and seeking to understand that a teen will stay bonded. The skilled parent can listen with fresh ears and an open heart to truly hear the fears and insecurities of each teen, without approving of all behavior.

10. Your child will only accept the grace to which you extend yourself

Let's face it. If there were a perfect way to raise a child, you would have read the book and followed it completely. Children being uniquely created and facing different challenges can often leave the parent feeling confused, discouraged and full of regret. Teens pick up on far more than what meets the eye and can often sense

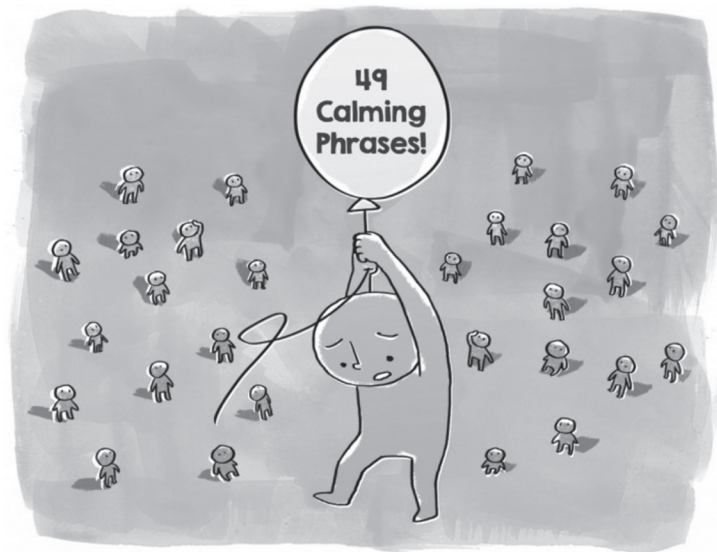
the underlying disquiet of their parents. This is the first time you have raised this child at this age and the first time they have tried to do life at this stage too. There are no rough drafts in parenting, only grace. So remember, how you respond to your own mistakes is as important as any reaction that you may show to your child.

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49 Phrases to Calm an Anxious Child

Renee Jain

Chief Storyteller at GoZen.com, Anxiety Relief Programs for Kids



It happens to every child in one form or another – anxiety. As parents, we would like to shield our children from life's anxious moments, but navigating anxiety is an essential life skill that will serve them in the years to come. In the heat of the moment, try these simple phrases to help your children identify, accept, and work through their anxious moments.

1. "Can you draw it?"

Drawing, painting or doodling about an anxiety provides kids with an outlet for their feelings when they can't use their words.

2. "I love you. You are safe."

Being told that you will be kept safe by the person you love the most is a powerful affirmation. Remember, anxiety makes your children feel as if their minds and bodies are in danger. Repeating they are safe can soothe the nervous system.

3. "Let's pretend we're blowing up a giant balloon. We'll take a deep breath and blow it up to the count of 5."

If you tell a child to take a deep breath in the middle of a panic attack, chances are you'll hear, "I CAN'T!" Instead, make it a game. Pretend to blow up a balloon,

making funny noises in the process. Taking three deep breaths and blowing them out will actually reverse the stress response in the body and may even get you a few giggles in the process.

4. "I will say something and I want you to say it exactly as I do: 'I can do this.'" Do this 10 times at variable volume.

Marathon runners use this trick all of the time to get past "the wall."

5. "Why do you think that is?"

This is especially helpful for older kids who can better articulate the "Why" in what they are feeling.

6. "What will happen next?"

If your children are anxious about an event, help them think through the event and identify what will come after it. Anxiety causes myopic vision, which makes life after the event seem to disappear.

7. "We are an unstoppable team."

Separation is a powerful anxiety trigger for young children. Reassure them that you will work together, even if they can't see you.

8. Have a battle cry: "I am a warrior!"; "I am unstoppable!"; or "Look out World, here I come!"

There is a reason why movies show people yelling before they go into battle. The physical act of yelling replaces fear with endorphins. It can also be fun.

9. "If how you feel was a monster, what would it look like?"

Giving anxiety a characterization means you take a confusing feeling and make it concrete and palpable. Once kids have a worry character, they can talk to their worry.

10. "I can't wait until ____."

Excitement about a future moment is contagious.

11. "Let's put your worry on the shelf while we ____ (listen to your favorite song, run around the block, read this story). Then we'll pick it back up again."

Those who are anxiety-prone often feel as though they have to carry their anxiety until whatever they are anxious about is over. This is especially difficult when your children are anxious about something they cannot change in the future. Setting it aside to do something fun can help put their worries into perspective.

12. "This feeling will pass. Let's get comfortable until it does."

The act of getting comfortable calms the mind as well as the body. Weightier blankets have even been shown to reduce anxiety by increasing mild physical stimuli.

13. "Let's learn more about it."

Let your children explore their fears by asking as many questions as they need. After all, knowledge is power.

14. "Let's count ____."

This distraction technique requires no advance preparation. Counting the number of people wearing

boots, the number of watches, the number of kids, or the number of hats in the room requires observation and thought, both of which detract from the anxiety your child is feeling.

15. "I need you to tell me when 2 minutes have gone by."

Time is a powerful tool when children are anxious. By watching a clock or a watch for movement, a child has a focus point other than what is happening.

16. "Close your eyes. Picture this..."

Visualization is a powerful technique used to ease pain and anxiety. Guide your child through imagining a safe, warm, happy place where they feel comfortable. If they are listening intently, the physical symptoms of anxiety will dissipate.

17. "I get scared/nervous/anxious sometimes too. It's no fun."

Empathy wins in many, many situations. It may even strike up a conversation with your older child about how you overcame anxiety.

18. "Let's pull out our calm-down checklist."

Anxiety can hijack the logical brain; carry a checklist with coping skills your child has practiced. When the need presents itself, operate off of this checklist.

19. "You are not alone in how you feel."

Pointing out all of the people who may share their fears and anxieties helps your child understand that overcoming anxiety is universal.

20. "Tell me the worst thing that could possibly happen."

Once you've imagined the worst possible outcome of the worry, talk about the likelihood of that worst possible situation happening. Next, ask your child about the best possible outcome. Finally, ask them about the most likely outcome. The goal of this exercise is to help a child think more accurately during their anxious experience.

21. "Worrying is helpful, sometimes."

This seems completely counter-intuitive to tell a child that is already anxious, but pointing out why anxiety is helpful reassures your children that there isn't something wrong with them.

22. "What does your thought bubble say?"

If your children read comics, they are familiar with thought bubbles and how they move the story along. By talking about their thoughts as third-party observers, they can gain perspective on them.

23. "Let's find some evidence."

Collecting evidence to support or refute your child's reasons for anxiety helps your children see if their worries are based on fact.

24. "Let's have a debate."

Older children especially love this exercise because they have permission to debate their parent. Have a point, counter-point style debate about the reasons for their anxiety. You may learn a lot about their reasoning in the process.

25. "What is the first piece we need to worry about?"

Anxiety often makes mountains out of molehills. One of the most important strategies for overcoming anxiety is to break the mountain back down into manageable chunks. In doing this, we realize the entire experience isn't causing anxiety, just one or two parts.

26. "Let's list all of the people you love."

Anais Nin is credited with the quote, "Anxiety is love's greatest killer." If that statement is true, then love is anxiety's greatest killer as well. By recalling all of the people that your child loves and why, love will replace anxiety.

27. "Remember when..."

Competence breeds confidence. Confidence quells anxiety. Helping your children recall a time when they overcame anxiety gives them feelings of competence and thereby confidence in their abilities.

28. "I am proud of you already."

Knowing you are pleased with their efforts, regardless of the outcome, alleviates the need to do something perfectly – a source of stress for a lot of kids.

29. "We're going for a walk."

Exercise relieves anxiety for up to several hours as it burns excess energy, loosens tense muscles and boosts mood. If your children can't take a walk right now, have them run in place, bounce on a yoga ball, jump rope or stretch.

30. "Let's watch your thought pass by."

Ask your children to pretend the anxious thought is a train that has stopped at the station above their head. In a few minutes, like all trains, the thought will move on to its next destination.

31. "I'm taking a deep breath."

Model a calming strategy and encourage your child to mirror you. If your children allow you, hold them to your chest so they can feel your rhythmic breathing and regulate theirs.

32. "How can I help?"

Let your children guide the situation and tell you what calming strategy or tool they prefer in this situation.

33. "This feeling will pass."

Often, children will feel like their anxiety is never-ending. Instead of shutting down, avoiding, or squashing the worry, remind them that relief is on the way.

34. "Let's squeeze this stress ball together."

When your children direct their anxiety to a stress ball, they feel emotional relief. Buy a ball, keep a handful of play dough nearby or make your own homemade stress ball by filling a balloon with flour or rice.

35. "I see Widdle is worried again. Let's teach Widdle not to worry."

Create a character to represent the worry, such as Widdle the Worrier. Tell your child that Widdle is worried and you need to teach him some coping skills.

36. "I know this is hard."

Acknowledge that the situation is difficult. Your validation shows your children that you respect them.

37. "I have your smell buddy right here."

A smell buddy, fragrance necklace or diffuser can calm anxiety, especially when you fill it with lavender, sage, chamomile, sandalwood or jasmine.

38. "Tell me about it."

Without interrupting, listen to your children talk about what's bothering them. Talking it out can give your children time to process their thoughts and come up with a solution that works for them.

39. "You are so brave!"

Affirm your children's ability to handle the situation, and you empower them to succeed this time.

40. "Which calming strategy do you want to use right now?"

Because each anxious situation is different, give your children the opportunity to choose the calming strategy they want to use.

41. "We'll get through this together."

Supporting your children with your presence and commitment can empower them to persevere until the scary situation is over.

42. "What else do you know about (scary thing)?"

When your children face a consistent anxiety, research it when they are calm. Read books about the scary thing and learn as much as possible about it. When the anxiety surfaces again, ask your children to recall what they've learned. This step removes power from the scary thing and empowers your child.

43. "Let's go to your happy place."

Visualization is an effective tool against anxiety. When your children are calm, practice this calming strategy until they are able to use it successfully during anxious moments.

44. "What do you need from me?"

Ask your children to tell you what they need. It could be a hug, space or a solution.

45. "If you gave your feeling a color, what would it be?"

Asking another person to identify what they're feeling in the midst of anxiety is nearly impossible. But asking your children to give how they feel with a color, gives them a chance to think about how they feel relative to something simple. Follow up by asking why their feeling is that color.

46. "Let me hold you."

Give your children a front hug, a hug from behind, or let them sit on your lap. The physical contact provides a chance for your child to relax and feel safe.

47. "Remember when you made it through XYZ?"

Reminding your child of a past success will encourage them to persevere in this situation.

48. "Help me move this wall."

Hard work, like pushing on a wall, relieves tension and emotions. Resistance bands also work.

49. "Let's write a new story."

Your children have written a story in their mind about how the future is going to turn out. This future makes them feel anxious. Accept their story and then ask them to come up with a few more plot lines where the story's ending is different.

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NFAPA SCHOLARSHIP

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 3, 2017

\$250 Scholarship

NFAPA offers a scholarship for an adoptive, foster, guardianship or kinship child, who wishes to further their education beyond high school or GED. The scholarship can be used for college, university, vocational, job training or online learning. The scholarship form is available on our website. Requirements and submission instructions are listed.



Waiting for a Forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.

Name: Alex

15 years old

Funny and gregarious, Alex has a good sense of humor. His favorite activities

include watching television, playing video games (he's really good at it), and reading chapter books and comic books. Alex also enjoys playing and watching basketball and football. He finds joy in simply being outdoors, riding his bike, and eating a variety of foods. Alex's idea of the perfect family would be one that gives him siblings, preferably one younger and one older.

Connections: Alex needs to maintain a relationship with his older brother and grandmother.



Name: Angel

15 years of age

Angel is a fun loving girl with a big heart who cares deeply about her little sister. She can be shy and soft spoken at first, but once she warms up to you she shares her outgoing side.

Ever creative, she enjoys participating in crafting activities, loves getting lost in books and expressing herself through writing. Angel loves to shop and spend time with her friends. Her favorite color is red and tacos are her favorite food. She enjoys sports---especially basketball and volleyball. Angel would thrive in a family that provides structure and consistency, while supporting and encouraging her to meet her full potential.

Connections: Angel needs to maintain a relationship with her sister.



For more information on these children or others on the Heart Gallery please contact Sarah at:
Email: scaladararo@childsaving.org
Phone: 402-504-3673

Name: Hannah

16 years old

Creative and caring, Hannah is an avid reader who enjoys all types of books. (Give

her a little free time and she will devour a book in less than a day). She also enjoys crocheting and making things for people. All of these activities often take place while listening to her favorite music-her diverse taste dependent on her mood.

Hannah is an ardent animal-lover (especially dogs and pandas), and enjoys visiting the zoo in warmer weathers. She's also a whiz in the kitchen and plans to become a chef someday.

Connections: Hannah needs to maintain relationships with some identified family members.



Parenthood
requires love,
not DNA.



Former Foster Youth Donates 100 Bags to Nebraska Foster Children



Shane is a San Diego County teenager on a mission.

At 16, he is an Eagle Scout, has inspired legislation in California and helped hundreds, if not thousands of foster children across the country.

Shane, a former foster youth, raised money to purchase a duffel bag, flashlight, teddy bear and blanket for at least 100 San Diego County foster youth as part of his Eagle Scout project. He completed this project when he was just 13 and was awarded National Eagle Scout Project of the Year Award.

As a former foster youth Shane experienced frequent moves and had to carry his belongings in a black trash bag. Shane was in foster care from age 5 to 9, at age 7 he went to live with Lisa Uribe that adopted him two years later.

And then there was the black trash bag his possessions traveled in.

"I would have loved to have a duffel bag, a blanket to keep me warm, a flashlight if I got scared and a teddy bear to hold close if I had a nightmare," he said.

Shane has thrived with his adoptive family and has risen quickly through the ranks of scouting. According to the Boy Scouts of America website, the average age of boys earning the Eagle Scout rank is 17 years old.

The project took a lot of work on Shane's part. He raised over \$6,000 in the first month. He partnered with the San Diego County Foster Parent Association to distribute the bags. After completing his project he hoped to make a permanent impact and he did. Shane's project inspired new legislation in San Diego County and now all foster youth are provided with a duffel bag with comfort items.

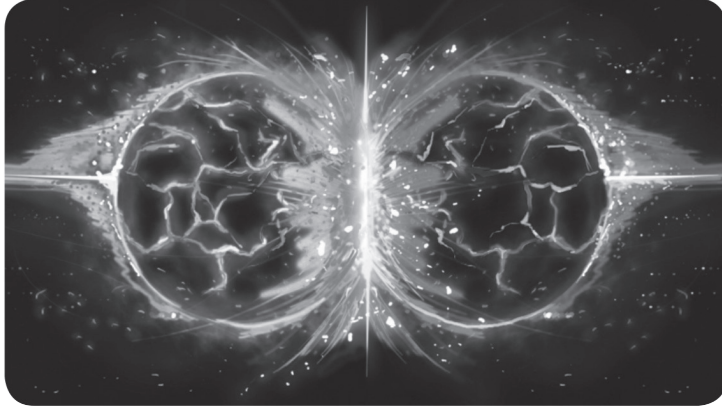
Shane then took his project to the national level. In 2016, Shane partnered with Cornerstone Hotels to provide 100 foster youth with duffel bags complete with blanket, flashlight, tooth paste/toothbrush and a stuffed animal. The bags were delivered to the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association to distribute throughout the state.

Do You Need Help Finding a Phone Number or Email Address of a State Employee?

Did you know you can utilize the state's Online Employee Directory to find contact information for DHHS staff? You can search for an employee by first or last name. The directory will provide you with their phone number and e-mail address. Here is the link: <https://ne-phonebook.ne.gov/PhoneBook/faces/welcome.jsp>



PARENTING TRAUMA: WHEN THEIR ATTACH- MENT ISSUES TRIGGER YOUR OWN



*In Paula Freeman's book, *A Place I Didn't Belong*, she talks about the collisions that take place in adoptive families. Namely, a collision happens when the expectations of an adoptive parent or family bump up against the reality of a child's past trauma or hurts. Said another way, the realities of our children's compromised beginnings collide, oftentimes in painful and nasty ways, with our own expectations for our family and our understanding of how relationships ought to work. We expect a child to act or behave like "x" but when he or she behaves or relates to others like "y", even though all other children in the home with the same parents bought into the "x" method, problems arise and collisions occur.*

Who is wrong? What went wrong? How did this happen? How did we fail?

Inevitably, when things aren't turning out as planned, parental insecurities are unearthed, the child's insecurities are further exposed, and a downward spiral ensues. It is not pretty. And that is a huge understatement. It downright sucks. The worst kind of suck. The kind where you are not even sure you will come out on the other end. The good news here is that you are not alone. I know this because I have heard from so many of you. I thought I was the only one. I am falling apart at the seams. I hate the person I have become. How did this happen? My marriage has crumbled. And so on and so forth.

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER, WARRIOR PARENTS! DO NOT GIVE UP HOPE!

Here's the reality, just in case no one has yet to tell you: collisions are normal and should be expected, but also have the potential take out all in their path and destroy hope and healing. Even when educated, armed with understanding, and surrounded by knowledgeable professionals, when trust has been harmed at such an early stage in life or in otherwise fundamental or devastating ways, there is no magic solution

for healing and no promise that everything is going to be ok. Science has not yet caught up to reality in terms of being able to identify resilience factors and/or being able to predict which children and families might overcome and which ones likely won't ever quite make it to the normal range.

And while the aforementioned collisions are normal, I also found myself asking, "Whose trust was broken? Just my child's? Or, did I somehow have my own trust broken along life's way? What wounds did I bring into the process that I likely didn't even know existed or may have even believed were completely healed?"

Parenting trauma brings out the best and worst in all of us and if I have learned one thing it is that scabs are ripped off along the way and wounds are uncovered that most of us would rather leave buried in the past. Unfortunately, that is not an option if we desire healing, for both our children and ourselves. We must confront not only our child's past trauma, but our own as well. We must confront our past relational hurts. We must confront our own broken connections and broken ways of doing life.

As I read this particular chapter in Freeman's book, I couldn't help but wonder if I was bringing my own unhealed hurt into the mix as well? Could it be possible that my child's attachment issues were triggering my own? The fact that I didn't even want to ask the question led me to believe I might need to circle the wagon to places and times long gone. And it turns out that it is not only possible, but highly probably that your child's attachment issues will trigger your own. How you have learned to attach or detach to others and situations, especially when stress levels are high, will play itself out in your home.

Did a parent hurt you or not provide a safe, nurturing space for you when you were very young?

Did your own family relationships lack warmth, trust, and compassion?

Did you lose a parent at a young age or watch a family member suffer disease, illness or death?

Was there a higher than normal level of stress in your childhood home?

Were your basic needs for clothing, food, and security met?

Did you witness a lot of arguing, fighting, or other domestic type disturbances?

When faced with a stressful situation today, are you likely to choose fight, flight, or freeze? Why?

Listen, I didn't want to circle back, and you might not either, but it is almost nonnegotiable. We can circle back and confront some painful memories OR sink the ship. Because when we welcome trauma into our home and life, the reality is that their trauma and attachment issues WILL-WILL-WILL expose our own attachment issues, attachment styles, or unresolved relational hurt.

Attachment and connection are built-in to our very design. From the very instant a baby is conceived, that life is attached

to another, utterly dependent on the trusted adult for his or her very life. And for many years after that baby is born, the same is true. Those attachments and connections are critical for our physical, mental, and emotional survival. We learn trust or mistrust, that the world is a safe or a dangerous place, and how to relate to others based on those primal connections. If your own connections were harmed along the way, you must be prepared to loop back around and do yourself and your child the justice that you both deserve. You are worth it! Your child is worth it!

While I may not have wanted to confront my own past, the truth is that I know I will be a stronger person and better parent for having done so, and those wounds that were buried under all the years, and covered with all the appropriate masks, will lose their hold on me.

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ATTACHMENT DISORDER: WHEN THE VERY FOUNDATION OF BEING HUMAN IS ALTERED

There are so many things I wish my husband and I would have known before embarking on the journey of building a trauma family. For starters, it would have been awesome to know that trauma families were even a thing.

It would have also been great to know that the very foundation of being a human being had been altered in my child, in ways that may never be able to be healed or made whole. For years I have struggled to put my finger on the invisible beast that can often wreak havoc in our family.

However, through therapy and relentless researching, I discovered something new recently about the nature of this beast. Namely, the very foundation of being human is that we are designed to connect with other human beings, especially our family and loved ones, through healthy, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal relationship. When we relate to other people in healthy ways, almost everything we do is done out of love, out of trust, and out of the belief that those we are in relationship with care about us too.

Introvert, extrovert, people person, project person, child, or adult, it doesn't matter. We are meant to be in relationship with other people. We cannot escape this in our homes, communities, or even our planet, as the earth itself is a closed system. We are in relationship. And what is at the heart of all healthy relationships? TRUST.

But for children with attachment disorder, trust has been broken at the most basic and foundational level. Their basic

needs for food, water, safety, shelter, and security were not met, or were only met in haphazard and anxiety producing ways. Whether this was intentional or unintentional does not really matter, because either way, brains and bodies were altered. It's that serious.

The world is not safe. People are not safe. Survival, therefore, becomes key. The brain and body of those living with attachment disorder or trauma scars may often revert or fluctuate in and out of survival mode. And while regular therapy and connected parenting strategies are essential and help move us forward, the truth is that switching into survival mode, even after years of being in a healthy environment, isn't a conscious choice for the child as much as it is the brain taking over and doing what it has been programmed to do.

The effect of this broken trust, could mean a lifetime of living in a hypervigilant, non-trusting or semi-trusting state, where relationships are always viewed or approached in a cautious and guarded fashion. In a previously written article on attachment disorder, I explain this more fully. For now, this image gives us a glimpse of how foundational breaks in trust occur:



What this means is that children living with attachment disorder often cannot form truly healthy relationships. And because relationships are at the heart of nearly everything we do as human beings, the entire human experience is altered by this horrible trust break. Worse, the relationship most impacted is the one with the new primary caregiver, be it adoptive parent, foster parent, guardian, or grandparent.

In many ways, the primary caregiver who steps in to parent, raise, and care for a child whose trust has been previously broken is often approached as the nurturing enemy. I have no words to describe how devastating and utterly depressing this reality is. It's a mixture of hopeless and helpless, with an extra-large side of carnal frustration and a daily sprinkling of Divine Grace that is only ever enough to help you persevere through whatever current challenge is before you.

Here is another part of the relational suck. In many ways, I, as mom, am no different or more special to my attachment-

challenged child than Ms. Katie across the street or Ms. Baker teaching in her classroom for several hours a day. While my child can explain what a parent is in cold, objective terms and phrases, there are not really any feelings or deep seeded emotion connected to them. Can you imagine?

Connected feelings, similar to trust, have been written off by the brain as dangerous and potentially deadly. Therefore, "avoid them!" her brain screams at what I imagine to be a deafening volume inside her head. And while again, connected therapy approaches teach us to name feelings and engage them, it is utterly devastating to know that my child cannot experience the fullness of parent-child relationships at this point.

Looking back now, at everything we didn't know then, I am both thankful and resentful for the lack of solid information and relevant training that was available to us. Thankful in that ignorance was bliss in many ways, for a few years at least but resentful and deeply hurt because we almost fell apart along the way.

It's not that anything we now know would change our past decisions, it's just that our family, and many likes ours, were/are completely unprepared for the realities of raising attachment challenged children. We were not prepared for what it would be like to build a family when one or more members of the family had experienced early childhood trauma, or any trauma for that matter, that reshaped their connection with parental figures, other human beings, and the world at large.

For years after trauma joined our family, I didn't have the words or the right kind of training or understanding to accurately articulate what was going on. For years, I shunned labels or diagnoses, because attachment disorder was supposedly "rare." It's not! I knew something was off, relationally speaking, but couldn't quite place it. I knew this particular relationship was different, different even from other children who joined our family via adoption, but thought trying harder on my end would help. I knew my child was deeply hurt on the inside, but didn't realize the extent of the trauma. I didn't realize that there may be some things about my child that I will never be able to fix. Maybe you have felt or are feeling that way right now?

I ran and denied and came up with other explanations because I didn't want to believe it could be her. It could be us. It is!

Since that time, we have accepted (and must continue to accept each day) the reality that we cannot run from early childhood trauma, attachment disorder, or the long-term effects it will have on our children and our family. We cannot "outyear it" by putting in more good years than there were bad, like I initially assumed. We certainly can't ignore it, as there are daily reminders. So, we can and must, as hard as it may be, simply accept that attachment disorder is real and that there will be unique struggles for us.

Every day, we commit ourselves to loving, parenting, engaging, and building up our children as best as we can. For

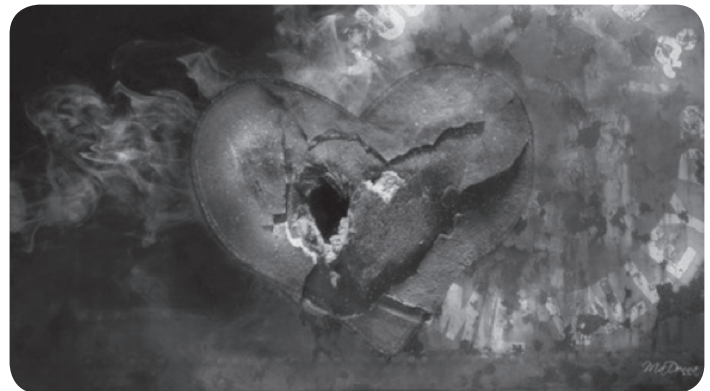
me, the most hurtful reality and daily challenge of parenting an attachment disordered child is not that life is hard, because I am gritty and determined and will find answers where they exist. Rather, the biggest devastation is the unspeakable and in many ways invisible reality that one of the most basic elements of being human, to relate to a parent or primary caregiver, in a caring, trusting, and healthy way, has been altered.

I AM MOM IN NAME ONLY AT THIS POINT. MOMS ARE THERE TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN, TO PROVIDE FOR, TO KEEP SAFE, TO PLAY WITH, AND TO HELP RAISE KIDS TO ADULTHOOD. THIS, WE KNOW. BUT FOR NOW, THERE ARE NO REAL FEELINGS ATTACHED TO THESE FACTS. NO UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT RELATIONSHIP MEANS.

And now that I know this, and know that this reality remains invisible to nearly everyone outside of our home, I also know why the damage done in my own heart and mind has been so severe. Being a mom in name is one thing, but being a mom in true relationship is the bread and butter. Healthy relationships, the bread and butter of being human, consist of invisible connections that enhance everything visible, and vice versa. Attachment disordered parent-child relationships on their own accord are often lacking bread, and lacking butter. Or, perhaps for some, the bread and butter is just deeply hidden and can be drawn out over time, maybe a lifetime even, with the help of loved ones and professionals.

Things were not meant to be this way. Human beings have been designed for right relationship, for security, for trust, and for love. When the foundation is broken, everything else will be impacted.

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Team Work in Foster Care

Dr. Lark Eshleman, Expert in Trauma and Attachment

Several years ago I presented a workshop called “Incorporating Family into Therapeutic Healing.” It was so enthusiastically received that I have offered the presentation over and again, to much the same response.

The secret of its success, I believe, is two-fold: (1) here are practical ways in which you, as parents (foster, adoptive, grand, etc) can and hopefully WILL engage in the therapeutic and educational process with your child. (2) Parents are encouraged to “use your gut. Believe in what you feel and think. YOU are your child’s expert, so use your strength and knowledge on your child’s behalf.” This assertion is usually met with stunned silence and then enthusiastic support. But as a professional in the field of attachment, trauma, foster care and adoption, I have known all along that I am definitely a team MEMBER, not the team leader.

Remember, though, that you need and deserve – and should demand – constant support for parenting a child who has come to you through foster care. When I developed and ran a mental health clinic for children and families, specializing in early attachment trauma, I emphasized that each child needed to be the center of a team, and that team should be captained by the parent, if he or she was willing, and that if there were two parents, that both parents had to be moving in the same direction.

As mental health professionals, we became part of each child’s team; the more of the child’s “world” joined the team, the better! Depending on the child, that included parent(s) and often other children in the family, case workers, therapists and medical professionals, teachers, school counselors, members of the child’s extended family and of their faith community, and “cheerleaders” – sometimes from the child’s birth family and always people who were wholeheartedly rooting for the child and willing to give time and energy to help support this child in a collaborative way.

So, how to lead this team? Here are some suggestions.

#1 - Chose your favorite books and articles, maybe one that you read in a foster parent class, and ask each member of the team to read. This raises everyone’s level of common understanding. It is critically important for you to understand that perhaps most of your “team” does not understand all that you do, your child’s situation and experiences, and how best to support your child.

#2 - Give your team members a few simple practices that will help your child. For example, if you know that it is helpful to your child to give a “5 minute notice” before changing activities, offer that suggestion to team members. If your child is able to participate in activities best by first taking several deep breaths, make sure that all teachers, therapists, and other members of the team

know that they should take time to encourage the child to do that. Keep introducing new information about the ways your child functions best.

#3 - Be a positive role model, and ask team members to do the same. If you know that your child needs to “count to 10” in order to calm down, then you do the same and ask team members to follow suit! This involves you being involved in your child’s therapy, also. When things are going right, parents are one of the absolute best resources a therapist can have. If you are not included in at least some aspect of therapy on a regular basis, ask why not....and talk with your case worker about the possibility that a different therapist might help you to become more involved in your foster child’s healing process.

#4 - Being a team leader does NOT mean that you do all the work, or that you have all the answers. Being a team leader means that you ask for help, accept what seems the most helpful, share information with all team members (yes, it takes time; maybe there’s a team member whose job is simply to help you organize and distribute/follow-up with communication), and support your team. It also means that you ask for help from the team, for yourself and your family. If your child is in need of a team, then YOU are in need of a supportive team, too. You can’t do this alone.

There is good news about the long-term benefits of teamwork foster care. One study shows that foster children who were supported by therapy during placement were significantly LESS likely to be in the judicial or mental health system as young adults, and were significantly MORE likely to have good jobs and be engaged in meaningful relationships. Good news for your child! Go TEAM!





Making the Commitment to Adoption

Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Facilitated by Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Register online at
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Lincoln_Spaulding

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C
Lincoln, NE

January 13, 2017: 6:00 p.m. -9:30 p.m.

January 14, 2017: 8:00 a.m. -5:30 p.m.

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

January 13, 2017

6:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

1) Exploring Expectations—Defining adoption, the process, and the key players. Participant's hopes and fears about the adoption process are recognized and empowerment strategies are identified to assist them in the process. Participant's explore their fantasies about children they might adopt to become aware of the possible influence on their decision about adoption.

January 14, 2017

8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

(one hour break for lunch)

2) Meeting the Needs of Waiting Children—Assist prospective adoptive parents in focusing on the needs of children awaiting adoption. Explore the issues of separation, loss, grief and attachment. Plus the unique issues related to parenting a child who has been sexually abused.

3) Exploring Adoption Issues—Identify supports within their family and introduce them to common issues that all adoptive families face. Help develop strategies for dealing with these issues; explore crisis periods in adoption; explore their own strengths, needs and challenges as they consider adoption.

4) Making the Commitment—Assist prospective adoptive parents in considering resources they may need, what they need to know, what they need to do, and what they need to explore about themselves as they consider adopting a particular child or children.

Registration Form – Spaulding Training | Lincoln | January 2017

Name: _____

Address: _____ City/Zip _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Register by mail: NFAPA, 2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C, Lincoln, NE 68521 | 402-476-2273 | Toll-Free 877-257-0176

Or by email: nichollette@nfapa.org

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 the 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 our calendar page on our website at www.nfapa.org. Support Groups will be cancelled for inclement weather.

Contact your Resource Family Consultants for more information.

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

Tammy Welker (Columbus): 402-989-2197

Terry Robinson (Southwest Area & FACES-Online Support Group): 402-460-7296

NFAPA Office: 877-257-0176

NFAPA has Support Groups at the following dates/times/locations. Please check our website for updated information and a list of new support groups being offered throughout the year.

WESTERN AREA

Alliance Support Group: Famer's State Bank Building,
1320 W. 3rd St, entrance in rear
6:00-7:30 p.m. Please RSVP to Jolie.

Scottsbluff Support Group: Regional West Medical Center,
in South Plaza Room 1204
6:00-7:30 p.m. Please RSVP to Jolie.

North Platte Support Group: Mid Plains Center
(1101 Halligan Drive)
6:00-8:00 p.m. Contact Terry Robinson.
Meets every other month on the first Thursday.
February 2, April 6, June 1, August 3, October 5, December 7

NORTHERN AREA

Columbus Support Group: Peace Lutheran Church
(2720 28th St.)

7:00-8:30 p.m. Childcare available.

Contact Tammy Welker.

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

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

January 10, February 14, March 14, April 11, May 9

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

FACES-Online Support Group:

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

Contact Nicholette at 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: Newman United Methodist Church (2242 R Street), Lincoln

6:30 p.m. Contact: Barbara Dewey, LICSW at 402-477-8278, ext. 1 to RSVP.

For more info: colorlineslincoln@gmail.com. Or

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

This group supports and strengthens racial identity in transracial families.

Watch our website for further dates or contact us by email or phone with any questions. Support only.

Please contact Barbara Dewey if you and your family can attend!

Resource Family Consultant's Offer First-Hand Experience

Have you ever wondered what they do and why they are calling? NFAPA's Resource Family Consultants (RFC) are current and former foster/adoptive parents just like you! With many years of experience, RFC's are able to provide Nebraska's resource families with first-hand knowledge and support. They build one-on-one relationships, which provide foster/adoptive families with emotional encouragement, skill reinforcement and parenting strategies that are unique to providing out of home care. They are trained to empower foster families to advocate for the children in their care. RFC's will contact you periodically by email or phone. NFAPA has RFC's across the state and most RFC's offer support groups in their service area. RFC's can offer you guidance on confidentiality, upcoming training dates, support groups, foster home licensing regulations and DHHS contacts. RFC's maintain confidentiality at all times. Working with a RFC will help families enhance the quality of care provided and stabilize placements. See page 2 for a list of NFAPA's Resource Family Consultants.



WHAT IS INSIDE

Five Myths About Foster Care Adoption.....	1
NFAPA Staff / Board of Directors.....	2
Attention Foster Parents!	2
Save the Date for Foster Parent Recognition	3
10 Things Your Child's Therapist Wish You Knew During Therapy and Beyond	3
49 Phrases to Calm an Anxious Child.....	5
NFAPA Scholarship.....	7
Waiting for a Forever HOME!	8
Former Foster Youth Donates 100 Bags to Nebraska Foster Children....	9
Do You Need Help Finding a Phone Number or Email Address of a State Employee?	9
Parenting Trauma:	
When Their Attachment Issues Trigger Your Own	10
Attachment Disorder:	
When the Very Foundation of Being Human is Altered	11
Team Work in Foster Care.....	13
Making the Commitment to Adoption	14
NFAPA Support Groups	15
Resources Family Consultant's Offer First-Hand Experience.....	15
JOIN NFAPA.....	16



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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, 2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C,
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, \$ _____