

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

November/December 2015

N F A N P A

The Joys and Challenges of Parenting Older Adopted Children

BY: DR. GARY MATLOFF

Introduction

Parenting adopted children brings with it unique challenges and rewards. Children adopted at older ages—especially those from the U.S. foster care system—typically come to their new families after a history of some trauma, abuse, or neglect, and a storehouse of unresolved emotions. From the start, adoptive parents need to be ready with their sleeves rolled up, prepared to work hard in order to experience the many rewards of adopting older children.

It is said that you never truly know someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes. Empathy, understanding the thoughts and feelings of another, is a learned skill, and grows only through consistent practice and follow-through. It is an especially important skill for adoptive parents to acquire, particularly when past experiences of trauma or neglect render their children uncooperative or disrespectful. At such times, traditional disciplinary practices need to be rejected in favor of practices that facilitate open, honest communication between parent and child. Adoptive parents must be ready and willing to fully commit to the ongoing, continual process of first understanding, then meeting the needs of their children.

Many older adopted children come to their new families already spinning on a cycle of emotions that start with feelings of shame. They might believe they were cast aside or rejected by their families of origin. These feelings can be perpetuated by subsequent experiences of instability in their lives—for example, if they are shuffled from foster placement to foster placement, unable to remain at the same school or put down roots. These children may have trouble believing that the prospect of adoption means familial stability will finally be realized.

Anger can emerge as a function of the hurt and grief they have experienced. They cannot direct their anger towards the source, or find resolution there, and so instead it is redirected to those closest to and most invested in them: their adoptive parents. Especially in the beginning, being mistrustful that their needs will be met further fuels the drive toward self-preservation and the need for control. A child may have difficulty attaching and bonding with his new parents because he is trying to defend himself from further rejection. He might battle for control over his destiny while his adoptive parents battle for authority in the name of his best interest.

Almost all children who have had a prolonged disruption in their caregiving leading to some form of institutionalization (e.g., foster care, orphanage, residential treatment facility) will display some form of attachment problems. By accepting the inevitability of having to work through some degree of attachment issues with their older adopted child, parents will be better prepared to seek the time and patience needed to parent a child who is simply waiting to see if she is loved before loving her parents back.

Autonomous Parenting

Autonomous parenting represents a relatively new approach, and at its heart lies an emphasis on fostering self-respect. Parents can provide opportunities for their children to make choices and take responsibility for those choices by teaching children appropriately and then stepping back. They can allow their children to explore, make mistakes, and—most importantly—learn from those mistakes. When tasks are challenging, growth takes place in the struggle. Every time a child accomplishes something on her own, it builds her self-confidence.

Autonomous parenting requires time and patience when allowing children to have some control in a world

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 9 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.

Just answer the following 9 questions and send us your answers! There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Felicia@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) and fill out/send in by email or mail or you can go to survey monkey and do the questionnaire on line at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JMVMJMZ>. 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. When is National Adoption Day?
2. What are two things we can do to make family get togethers easier?
3. What are three things you as a foster parent can do to reduce stress during the holidays?
4. Name one way you can work with a Birth Family during the holidays?
5. What is the meaning behind the Holidays?
6. Where can you provide feedback on your foster care experience if you no longer foster?
7. Fill in the blank. _____ parenting requires time and patience when allowing children to have some control in a world where adults typically make all the decisions.
8. Fill in the blank. When conflict is over it is essential to _____ and _____.
9. The risk of burnout increases when people:

A) Are workaholics	D) Are perfectionists
B) Lack support	E) All of the above
C) Feel powerless	

Name: _____

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

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where adults typically make all the decisions. When a problem arises, it is important for the parent to resist the urge to provide solutions that bail their child out; rather, their child's struggle should be respected. He should be given the time and support necessary to work through the process, toward a solution. He needs to experience whatever the outcome might be for himself, with his parents ready to ride the wave of success with him or comfort him if he should fail. Allowing their child to own his destiny, within the context of what is reasonable and with the appropriate boundaries still in place, communicates a kind of acceptance he may not have experienced in the past.

The fact that a child was adopted never goes away; it is an undeniable part of who she or he is. Autonomous parenting fits especially well in the parenting of these children; parents can't do the emotional recovery work for their adopted children, yet their support can hold special meaning for them. For many of these children, who have a history of relationship disruption, having a parent who is tuned into their need for control and nurturing in their caregiving can be integral in helping them develop an attachment. Although we still have yet to see longitudinal studies corroborating the anecdotes of many families, positive results of autonomous parenting speak to the strength of the human propensity for relatedness. Older children adopted by supportive caregivers utilizing autonomous parenting practices often develop trusting and secure attachments.

“The Twelve Commandments of Parenting Older Adopted Children”

Perhaps the greatest fear adopted children have is the fear of being rejected or abandoned again. Adoptive parents must communicate to their children complete, unconditional love and commitment, especially during difficult times.

Abandonment should never be threatened (Commandment #1), as it only reinforces fear and non-acceptance, further fostering a defensive mindset that breeds an “I’ll reject you first!” reaction. These children challenge their parents not because they want to leave, but because they want their parents to prove to them that they are wanted. If parents need to correct their child's behavior, it would be best to communicate with them in an inclusive way; e.g., “You are part of our family, and we don't act that way.” An adopted child should never be left in doubt of their parent's lasting commitment.

These children have likely experienced a great deal of unpredictability in their young lives, often marked by chaos and fear. Their lives might have been in constant flux, with expectations and rules always changing. Often there was no one they could rely on. Structure, therefore, equals safety.

Embrace structure (Commandment #2), for having a consistent routine provides children with security and predictability. If the rules are firmly in place and never change, then the child can begin to alter his or her behavior to what is acceptable and more normative within the adoptive family. A byproduct of placing an emphasis on structure and routine is the fostering of dependence (Commandment #3). As a child matures, her normal development is marked with the move toward greater independence. But older adopted children have had to learn self-sufficiency early in life, usually in a maladaptive manner, in order to survive. Many have had to try and meet their own needs and parent themselves. Parents should not, therefore, wait for their child to ask for what she needs, as she might take this as a sign that she is not cared and provided for. It is the parents' task to help their child “let go” and allow others to care for her—to be the child she could not be before.

Too many children who are adopted from foster care have understandable issues related to food. All too common are bouts of stealing, hoarding, gorging, and/or lying about food, in response to a past when there was uncertainty about being regularly fed. Food also tends to be heavily symbolic of nurturance, and conditions should never be placed on love and nurturance.

Therefore, food should never be used as a consequence (Commandment #4). Children who are sent to bed hungry won't learn the lesson parents hope they will; instead they will learn that their basic needs may not be met.

Authentic relationships between people must be anchored by genuineness and sincerity. When an adoptive parent maintains honesty in all their relations with their child (Commandment #5), they subsequently maintain their integrity and trustworthiness. Being realistic with these children is a must, as they will hold you to whatever you should say, regardless of whether it might have been uttered as a passing thought, without consideration of the logistics, practicality, affordability, etc. Many older adopted children have already experienced numerous disappointments in their lives, and they will be acutely aware of any promises that are made. They are watching to see if they can trust that you mean what you say. Rather than make promises that you might not be able to keep, be honest and say “We really hope we are able to do this.”

Children who have attachment issues often struggle to feel that they are a part of the family. It is not unusual for these children to try and cut their losses and walk away.

It is important for the parent to beat them to the emotional punch and *check back* with them (Commandment #6)—to take the initiative, rather than simply expect there will be some sort of acknowledgment. Parents should develop a ritual of hugs, a last look, a wave, etc. whenever there is a separation from their child. This will serve as a reminder that the parent continues to be part of their child's life, even if they cannot be physically seen or heard. The relationship between parent and child then becomes more of a constant rather than a transient and unreliable idea.

For older adopted children, who have likely experienced harsh punishments for misbehavior, parents should resist disciplinary practices that isolate them. These disciplinary practices only cause greater inner turmoil, and do not teach or enforce proper behavior.

It is often far more effective to pull these children in *closer* to the parent, by conducting a *time-in rather than time-out* (Commandment #7). A time-in might mean the child must sit in a chair in the kitchen while the parent cooks, or must do chores rather than be sent to their room. Being isolated, away from the parent, only reinforces their feelings of rejection. They need to feel respected and valuable enough to be taught the "right way" of behaving. A time-in that involves talking and spending time together further enhances bonding, which is a typically fragile process with older adopted children.

These children tend to look at the world through a filter that is negatively colored by their past experiences. It is the parents' job to *change the filter* (Commandment #8). If a child was constantly shouted at, his adoptive parents will be far more effective if they react calmly and quietly, however challenging this might be. For the child who was talked down to and physically intimidated, the adoptive parents should get down at their eye level rather than tower over them in what could be perceived as a threatening manner. Even if parents are uncertain about what their child might have experienced in the past, it can be reasonably certain that their filter is colored by negative experiences, and needs to be replaced with a more positive filter.

It only takes a flash before the struggle for control becomes a losing proposition. *Pick your battles* (Commandment #9) and refrain from making an issue over something that cannot or does not need to be controlled. Keeping the peace rather than "sweating the small stuff" will better preserve parental influence and authority for larger issues. It might be difficult at times

for parents to tolerate a child's actions or preferences or desires. But these forms of self-expression (i.e., clothing, hairstyles, or relatively harmless television, movie, or music preferences) are far less important than rules and practices emphasizing safety, respect, and appropriate boundaries.

The *use of humor* (Commandment #10) can also be highly effective in defusing a conflict. Humor is best used as that "unexpected" turn that alters the rigid perspectives fueling a battle of wills. With humor, initially fixed viewpoints can begin to soften, allowing for reason and cooperation to creep in. It can also allow parents to keep their perspective when feeling unnerved, helping them avoid overreaction. By keeping a more flexible frame of mind in noting the absurdity of their child's words and/or actions, their child becomes more transparent, and subsequently easier to redirect.

Most difficult for parents during trying times with their child is the need to *keep it in perspective* (Commandment #11). Children's behavior shouldn't be taken personally, even when targeted specifically—e.g., "You're not my real mother!" For adopted children, these outbursts are related to the deep-seated, unresolved anger and grief with which these children struggle, projected onto their adoptive parents. When a more rational state of being returns, parents can also help their children keep matters in perspective by reminding them to "Say what you mean, and mean what you say."

When the conflict is over, it is essential to *forgive and forget* (Commandment #12). "Forgetting" in this case simply means agreeing to move on. All children, even adopted children, can be remarkably resilient in being ready to give the "family thing" another try after a heated moment with their parents. However, these children need the conflict to remain in the past, and not be constantly held over their heads. Praising children for better, more constructive behavior will have a far greater impact than needlessly rehashing what they have done wrong in the past.

Conclusion

A common theme of the Twelve Commandments of Parenting Older Adopted Children is the emphasis on *flexibility*. Parenting according to some fixed, universal idea of what it means to raise children risks harming these children via unrealistic and imposed expectations that are not necessarily relevant to their needs. Responsive, sensitive communication is essential for parenting older adopted children, as a means of forming and encouraging meaningful attachment. The potential for a secure, loving attachment does not reside in the child alone; it is the

parent's job to nurture a secure attachment in their child. The adoptive parent manages and facilitates an attuned connection with their child within a framework of unconditional love, clear limits and boundaries, and firm but appropriate discipline.

Source: *National Council for Adoption*

NFAPA Newsletter Survey Winners!



Congrats to the following winners of the \$10 Gift card drawings:

January/February – Ann Horton Omaha

March April – Cindy Berry Omaha

May/June – Trent Senske Omaha

July/August – Susan Fisher Bradshaw

National Adoption Month

November is National Adoption Month! This is a way to raise awareness of the more than 400,000 children in foster care across America with over 100,000 of those children waiting for permanent, loving families. On November 21, 2015, many families will be finalizing their adoptions of children from foster care but is also a day to celebrate for all families who adopt. These celebrations take place nationwide each year on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Take time to celebrate the joys of adoption and encourage more people to create or grow families through adoption.



Our Foster to Adoption Journey

My husband, Dana, and I have been blessed with four amazing biological children. Our oldest, Preston, is 19 lives in Omaha and attends college at UNO studying pre-med. Our oldest daughter, Desarae, is 17 and a senior in high school. Our middle daughter, Kelsey, is 13 and in the 8th grade. The youngest daughter, Shylee, is 11 and in the 6th grade.



Our journey started in May, 2013, when we got Gage, age 1 as a foster placement. We knew the goal was reunification with Gage and his biological mother. After two years of fostering and several road blocks along the way, Gage's biological parents signed away their parental rights. With several delays along the way, our adoption finally took place October 21, 2015. It was a long process but definitely worthwhile.



Our family is definitely blessed with our new addition to the family, Gage Dramse!! Our hearts are full-**WE ARE THE LUCKY ONES!!!**

Self Care for Foster Families During the Holidays

Just as the holidays can cause emotional turmoil for children in care, the same is often true for foster parents. It's helpful if you can recognize the emotional upheaval that the holidays can have on your lives. After all, in order to be a resource for children in care, you need to make sure you are taking care of yourself.

What can you do to reduce the amount of stress in your life? Here are some suggestions:

- *Take breaks, including respite resources.*
- *Spend quality time with your partner, other close family members, or friends.*
- *Honor your family traditions by replicating them with your family.*
- *Make time to enjoy the things in your life that are important to you.*
- *Take time to relax.*
- *Try not to let yourself get caught up in the hoopla of holiday buying frenzy.*
- *Have fun! The holidays can be a lot of work but don't lose sight of the happy times.*
- *Exercise both mentality and physically. This is an important time to take care of yourself, both your mind and your body.*
- *Be playful. The holidays are a great time to learn through the eyes of your children.*
- *Give back by volunteering at an agency in your community.*
- *Attend a foster or adoptive parent support group or training.*
- *Contact another foster or adoptive parent for support.*

Fostering can be stressful no matter what time of the year but with the holidays there can be added stressors. Remember, it is important for you to take care of yourself so that you will be able to provide all the necessary care and support for the children in your care.

Your family needs you and you need your family. Make sure you are doing all that you can to take care of yourself and remember to take time out to enjoy all of the great times the holidays can create for you and your family.

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<http://wifostercareandadoption.org>

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Recommended Resources Self Care for Families

<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/310/SelfCare2.pdf>

Basic Guidelines for Self Care from the National Foster Parent Association

http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/Basic_Guidelines_for_Self_Care.pdf

Exit Exam

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>



Parenting Across the Color Lines - Pot Luck Dinner

This group strives to build relationships among parents, teens and adult adoptees. It supports and strengthens racial identity in transracial families through developing dialog, monthly meetings, and events.

**You are invited
to our Holiday
Pot Luck dinner!**



Bring the family and a dish to share!
Friday, November 13, 2015 at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Newman United Methodist Church
2242 R Street, Lincoln, NE

Email: colorlineslincoln@gmail.com

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

RSVP to Barbara Dewey, LICSW, at 402-477-8278, ext. 1

Overcoming Parent Burnout

Author: Robbi Blume, Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association Resource Family Consultant-Northern Area

Parenting can be a tough job. In order to work with our children, it is important to remember to take care of ourselves first. This is often easier said than done.

Burnout is a common psychological problem that affects people of all ages, but is most common in “helping” professions (nurses, caregivers, teachers, parents). These people tend to sacrifice themselves for others and often end up being burned out – exhausted, listless, and unable to cope. Burnout is a condition that derives from stress and poor stress management. It occurs over a period of time, usually months, and leads to physical and mental exhaustion.

As caregivers we often struggle to fit all the things we need to do into our available time. We sometimes find it difficult to deal with the emotional involvement it takes to care for another human being. It becomes difficult to see the tangible results and appreciation for all our efforts.

A helping professional (parent) must often keep their own feelings inside to provide for the best interest of the child or person they are trying to help. A primary stressor for caregivers is the demand to take on other people’s pain, anger, and hostility. Many negative feelings may be directed toward the parent or caregiver as they are a safe target. Parents must continue to try to understand and empathize with the child or person needing care.

We have to perform a juggling act each day. We must balance our needs, our spouse’s needs and the needs of our [health and/or behavior] impaired children’s siblings, too. It is not surprising that with so much to deal with on a daily basis we often find ourselves going into survival mode. We find ways to distance and protect ourselves from too many demands even though this behavior can decrease our effectiveness as caregivers.

The risk of burnout increases when people:

- *Lack support*
- *Feel powerless*
- *Are perfectionists*
- *Are workaholics*

Some of the symptoms of burnout include:

- *Fatigue*
- *Health failure (headaches, back pain, stomach ache)*
- *Feelings of sadness and anger*
- *Appetite changes*
- *Depression or lack of interest in everyday activities that were once enjoyed*
- *Feeling like running away*

- *Feeling trapped or hopeless*

Awareness is key to preventing burnout. Even if you don’t fit in any of the common categories, a busy lifestyle with little support is enough to trigger burnout. Try making a few of these simple changes to keep burnout at bay:

- *Learn to relax*
- *Keep a journal*
- *Get enough sleep*
- *Eat well*
- *Be physically active*
- *Express yourself*
- *Laugh everyday*
- *Let someone take care of you*
- *Develop and maintain a social support system (friends, neighbors, co-workers, church family)*
- *Use respite care*

Sometimes caregivers need a temporary break from caregiving so they can come back refreshed and ready to provide good care again, which makes respite care a valuable tool for families. By respite, I don’t mean dropping your child off with strangers, who don’t understand his/her medical or behavior needs. I mean finding activities within your community that the child may attend for short periods of time: story time at the library, 4H club meetings or church youth group.

It can be as simple as hiring someone to come into your home while you are there to play a game or do an activity with the child while you take a bath – yes, by yourself – or make a phone call. Plan this in advance, so you can look forward to a break. Periodic respite enhances the quality of care we provide as parents. Commit to “self care” and make a plan. From now on, I will make time to take care of myself by doing the following:

Once a day:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Once a week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Once a month:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Check up on yourself by asking:

- *When was the last time I had a really good laugh?*
- *How often do I eat breakfast?*
- *How often do I connect with other parents? Friends?*
- *When was my last date night?*
- *When did I last read something for fun?*

Remember, you are making a difference in the life of a child and we are thankful for that.

Waiting for a forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.

Name: Jenni (13 years old)

This is Jenni and she LOVES horses! She will absolutely light up at the mention of anything horse related. She has ready many books about horses and their care. One day she hopes to have one of her own and be able to ride as often as she would like. Jenni is an avid reader of all books, not just the ones about horses. It's not surprising that reading would be her favorite class in school. When not in school, Jenni enjoys being an active kid. She loves running, dancing and playing sports. She is adventurous and is happy to explore what the world has to offer. Jenni is looking forward to meeting her forever family and does not care if the family is viewed as non-traditional "As long as they love me and enjoy having me around."



Connections: Jenni needs to maintain contact with her grandmother and cousins.

For more information:

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

Phone: 402-504-3673

Name: Nate (10 years old)

Nathaniel, or Nate as he's called, is artistic and energetic. Like most boys his age, Nate loves superheroes, especially Spiderman. He loves to use his creativity to draw his favorite superheroes and create stories for them. He also likes building and crafting and he can construct robots, cars, and more out of just paper and



cardboard. Nate enjoys playing board games and video games with friends his age, but also thrives from one-on-one attention from people he cares about. Nate has a vibrant personality and is very well liked by those around him. He is intelligent and learns new things easily. Nate is protective and takes pride in his role as a big brother.

Connections: Nate needs to maintain contact with his siblings.

For more information:

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

Phone: 402-504-3673

Name: Casie (12 years old)

Casie is a very active and friendly young lady. She enjoys meeting new people and opens up easily once she gets to know you. Casie loves being around animals, but is especially fond of dogs and cats. She would love to have a pet some day. Casie's favorite activities are swimming lessons and tumbling class. She keeps busy at school as well participating in choir and volleyball. While Casie loves to be active, she also likes spending down time playing video games and reading on her Kindle. Casie is very affectionate and enjoys being hugged and cuddled. She thrives when receiving positive attention and reinforcement. Casie gets along well with other children, especially those younger than her. She looks forward to being able to babysit when she gets older. Casie is excited to become part of a forever family.



Connections: Casie needs to maintain a relationship with her aunts and cousins.

For more information:

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

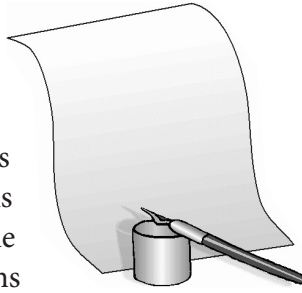
Phone: 402-504-3673



A Letter From The Executive Director

Felicia Nelsen

It is that time of year again! I can't believe how fast the year has gone. Seasons are changing; fall is in the air and winter is fast approaching. But this is my favorite time of year. The leaves change color, the air turns brisk, the smell of wood burning in fireplaces or camp fires permeate the air and the stores are displaying their holiday merchandise.



Right now, families are decorating their homes, decisions are being made who is coming or where you are going for Thanksgiving, Christmas or other holidays you may celebrate. Kids are getting excited, meals are being planned, and gifts are being thought of. As you are planning for the holidays have you thought about what the holiday's means for your foster child? Have you taken the time to find out? Many times, the holidays may bring up uneasy memories. Or maybe their family does not have the same traditions like yours does.

As foster parents, you know the better you are prepared, the better parent you can be for a child. So take some time to think how you and your family can celebrate your holiday traditions and make sure your foster child enjoys them too. Hopefully you have established a relationship with the bio parents. Talk with them about what they do for the holidays. Do they do something special together as a family? Play a certain game, decorate the tree at a specific time, play certain music, attend an event or even have a particular food their family enjoys? How can you incorporate their traditions with yours? You can and it doesn't need to be over the top!

1. Fix some of their favorite dishes along with yours.
2. Ask if they can bring an ornament from home to be included on your tree (be sure to return it at the end of the holiday).
3. Go buy a holiday movie that maybe their family always watches and take the time to watch it as a family with your foster child.
4. Go as a family to a church service that your foster child wants to attend.
5. Buy a gift that your foster child can give to his/her family or maybe just get pictures done of your foster child to give as a gift (this does not need to cost a lot of money, just thought).

6. Think outside your comfort box. How about spending some time with the bio family on the holiday? It could be in your home, theirs or at a neutral location. Be sure to clear it with your worker ahead of time. This way the child can enjoy spending time with their family for the holiday too.

Even if you are not close with the bio parents, take the time to ask the child and even the caseworker to see what you can do. Taking the time and effort to make sure your foster child enjoys the holidays is such a small compromise for your family but can make a significant difference for your foster child. Holidays are stressful enough. No need to make them more frustrating. Who knows, maybe you will be adding to your family traditions and what a great way for your family to incorporate something new. I hope you have a wonderful holiday and thank you for all you do as a foster family. You do make a difference, one child at a time.

Fall Fun

In September NFAPA was invited to provide the concession stand for the State and National Quick Draw shooters. It was held in Valentine on Sept. 17th, 18th and 19th. It was hosted by Valentine's local



club the Sparks Spurs. The Club hosted NFAPA and about a hundred other shooters. We served lots of coffee and pie. We enjoyed the company of this kind and generous group. We had a great time and raised money to help families across Nebraska. A big Thank You to Dean and Nancy Storms and the Sparks Spurs club.



Tip Sheets: Quick References for Parents

Celebrating Holidays with Children You Foster

Conflicting loyalties and lost dreams often make the holidays a difficult time for children in foster care. Just as studies show that holidays are stressful times for most of us, these reactions are compounded for youth placed in your home. Here are some suggestions for the holidays.

How can my family make it easier for the children in foster care while they are in our home?

- Talk about the season ahead of time. Talk about how your family celebrates the holidays. Tell children which of the traditional holidays your house recognizes. Is it Thanksgiving? St. Nick's Day? Kwanzaa? Hanukah? Christmas? New Year? Or all of the above? Talking about the holidays gives children time to anticipate the upcoming activities and ask questions.
- Help children in foster care imagine what to expect in your home. Much of what we assume to be commonplace can be new to the children you foster.
- Share the religious meanings the holidays may have for your family. Talk about your family's specific customs and activities.
- Use this time of sharing to learn especially about the religious beliefs, customs, and activities of the children you foster.
- Try to incorporate at least some of their traditions into your traditions.
- Some parents try to keep the holidays low key in order to help minimize some of the stress.

How can we work with birth families during the holidays?

- Again, ask children about their experiences and try to incorporate some of their traditions. The children placed in your home may miss some activities that they experienced with their family or in a previous placement.

- If possible, ask your child's family members about their holiday traditions and customs. Ask about their beliefs and observances. Although you may feel stretched at the holidays, try to coordinate schedules with the birth families. This gives the children a chance to share what is familiar while experiencing new traditions.
- This is a good time for the youth in your home to make small gifts and send cards to their birth families or old neighbors and friends.
- This is a time when many children feel conflicted feelings about their birth families and worry about them. It is a good time to let the young person know that it is okay for them to be safe and cared for even if their family struggles. Reassure them if you can, about the safety and care of their birth family.

What are some of the ways I can help the children who I foster get through the holidays? What are some signs of grief or sadness that I can look for?

- Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Talk about your child's feelings throughout the season.
- Give your children time and space to grieve. Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:
 - Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally
 - Soiling themselves or bedwetting
 - Becoming withdrawn and isolated
 - Having temper tantrums
 - Being rebellious
 - Complaining more than usual
- Try to remember the developmental age of the children you foster. It will also help you to stay patient if you keep in mind the challenges of the season for your child before you react.

Celebrating Holidays with Children You Foster, continued

What are some things we can do to make family get-togethers easier?

- Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If you cannot get together before the big event, introduce your children to family and friends who will be at the celebration by going through pictures.
- Prepare them for the “characters” in your family and also tell them about other children who might be there.
- Tell them if your celebrations are quiet or loud, sacred or silly, big or small.
- Describe the home or place where the event will be held, and tell how it usually proceeds.
- Be realistic about it—do not make your celebrations seem perfect, but do not stress the challenges that are part of all family events.
- Give your children a camera so that they can record the celebration, and also give them one for holiday visits with their birth families.

What can I do to help my childre learn what is expected of them at family celebrations?

- This is an opportunity to teach the behaviors and manners that you would like the youth you

foster to learn. Go over basic manners such as “please” and “thank you.”

- Explain the expectations of children prior to family get-togethers, and practice those behaviors ahead of time.
- Use role playing at home so that they can practice.
- Make sure you and your family/friends are on the same page regarding gifts from and to your children. Perhaps try to have your child bring a small hostess gift to the get together: baked goods, nuts, candles, ornament, etc.
- Tell family and friends about your children, and try to introduce them before the holidays. It’s a good time to remind others about the confidentiality you honor concerning the children you foster, and it might be a good time to practice some polite but firm answers to some questions.
- Remember especially to ask your children what they would like to have shared about themselves.



Resources

Utah Division of Child and Family Services brochure, The Holidays in Foster Care: <http://www.hsdccfs.utah.gov/PDF/Weekly%20Updates/The%20Holidays%20In%20Foster%20Care%20Brochure.pdf>

Adoption.Com of the Adoption Network Law Center; Expect Weird Responses from Foster Kids Towards the Holidays: <http://library.adoption.com/foster-parenting-and-adoption/expect-weird-responses-from-foster-kids-toward-the-holidays/article/1653/1.html>

Connect for Kids; Home or Homeless for the Holidays: <http://www.connectforkids.org/node/152>.

About .com; Before You Celebrate the Holidays in Foster Care by Carrie Craft: <http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/bb/fosterholidays.htm>

Foster Club at: http://www.fosterclub.com/transport/holidays_youth.pdf

Adoption From Foster Care-A Growing Family

Author: Dr. John DeGarmo is a foster and adoptive father. He has been a foster parent for 13 years, with over 40 children coming through his home. He is the author of many books, the Brand NEW book *Helping Foster Children in School*



Over the years, my own family has been blessed with the gift of adopting three children from foster care. These have been joyous events for my family, but there were also times of great anxiety, too, when it appeared that the adoptions might not go through as first planned. Fortunately, all three adoptions did take place, and my wife and I are now loving parents of six children. Three of these are biological, three are adopted. Three children are considered “white” by today’s society, while the other three are considered “black.” In our home, though, there is no difference in color, as we believe that we are all the same color; just different shades of God’s skin.

When a child is placed into foster care, the initial goal is to have the child reunified with his birth parents, or a member of his biological family. To be sure, the initial intent of placing a child into care is that the placement be a temporary, with reunification the main objective. Yet, there are those instances when reunification is not possible, and the child is placed through the court system for adoption. There are several reasons why a foster child might be placed up for adoption. First, the custody rights of the birth parents are voluntarily terminated; secondly, the custody rights of the birth parents are terminated by a court order; and third, the child is up for adoption due to the death of birth parents.

As foster parents, there are many reasons why we are the ideal choice to adopt a foster child. Many times when a child from foster care has his rights terminated, he has already been living in a loving and stable home with his foster family. When we care for foster children, we raise them as our own for an extended amount of time, meeting his needs, and nurturing him since he was removed from his birth parent’s home. Perhaps you are a foster family that cares for children with special needs. If so, you are the ones most familiar with these needs, and have gained valuable insight and resources how to best meet them and

care for your foster child. Often times, we have formed strong, loving, and important attachments with our foster children while they are placed in our home. If you are like me, our foster children sometimes become a member of our family, and when they are able to legally stay with us, there is a time of rejoicing. I must admit to you, though, that sometimes the adoption process can end in grief. My wife and I have also suffered from two failed adoptions; two adoptions from the foster care system that did not work out, leaving my entire family confused, and in grief. We are not alone in this, as so many families have suffered from this, as well.

Just because a foster child finds a forever family when he is adopted does not mean that it will be smooth sailing afterwards, or that there will not be difficulties or challenges ahead. Help your former foster child and now permanent member of your family by working with him to understand why the adoption took place, and why he has a new family. Yet, the internal process for all involved can be a challenging one, especially for your child. They may have a difficult time accepting the fact that they will never return to live with their biological parents or birth family members again. It is necessary for you, as an adoptive parent, to allow your child time to grieve the loss of connection with his birth family. He may very well need time to experience the stages of grief before he fully transfer attachment from his birth family to yours.

Even though he may have lived in your home for some time as a foster child, he will likely re-experience feelings of loss during the adoption process. Allow him to discuss his feelings of grief and loss with you as you listen attentively to him, validating his feelings and emotions. If he should ask any questions about his biological parents or birth family, it is important that you answer them as honestly as you can. At the same time, help him to transfer attachment from his birth family to yours by ensuring that he is included in all aspects of your family, and when possible, incorporate parts of his previous family’s traditions into your own, as it helps him to feel more comfortable. After all, his birth family gave him his appearance and gender, his intelligence, his temperament, talents, and of course, his life. These, of course, will never change.

The adoption of three children from foster care has led to so many adventures, challenges, joys, and experiences for my family. Just because we signed some paper work, making the children legally ours, does not mean that the new discoveries and challenges fade away. On the contrary, we are learning new things about these children

on an almost daily basis. Perhaps the greatest discovery my family and I are learning is that the amount of love one can hold in a heart never seems to end. My family has not only grown in size from these adoptions, they have grown in love, as well. Surely, my cup runneth over. Surely, I am blessed.

-Dr. John DeGarmo

A Letter to the Foster Care Youth

An open letter to youth in foster care: a young alumni's perspective

by DANIEL J. KNAPP, FosterClub

I absolutely love the Holiday Season! I start listening to Christmas music a few weeks before young trick-or-treaters scout their neighborhoods, dressed in the Halloween garb, looking for a favorite piece of candy. Some say I am crazy for listening to Christmas music so early, but I just don't think a month is long enough to thoroughly enjoy those great Holiday tunes.

The meaning behind the Holidays is more than stuffing your face with grandma's homemade pecan pie or getting the year's hottest toy or even enjoying the music. What it's all about is coming together as a family and enjoying and treasuring each other's company.

As a foster kid I used to hate the Holidays because I wasn't with my family. After my father died the Holidays seemed never the same. While in foster care I was able to go home, but only on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. I found that being with loved ones the whole season is what makes the Holidays so special. Going home on just two days or even for the weekend wasn't enough.

In those days, I often felt like an outsider because I was just a foster kid, especially during the Holidays. I struggled emotionally when my foster family celebrated the Holidays because I wanted to feel what I thought they were feeling. Even though I was included in all of the Holiday celebrations I often felt left out because to me I was just "borrowing" their family and ultimately their joy.

From: <http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/community/volunteers/HelpYouthInFC-Holidays.pdf>

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Right Turn

Right Turn is excited to begin its sixth year of providing services in Nebraska! On January 1st 2010, we began taking phone calls from adoptive and guardianship families whose children were previously in the Nebraska foster care system. We met some amazing families along the way who have helped us to adapt to and advocate for the ever changing needs of adoptive families. We encourage families to contact us with anything from their

smallest questions to their biggest concerns.

right turn[®] Our licensed staff are available to listen, answer questions and discuss concerns 24/7.
adoption STRONG

For those families who want something more, our well trained post adoption staff is available across the state to provide ongoing one-on-one support. We listen and work with families to develop a unique plan to help address whatever the concern may be. We're strong advocates and experts in finding and connecting families to resources. We can introduce you to other parents who have shared experiences, locate skilled mental health resources, help you to identify childcare or respite care, and much more. Nearly 1,000 families have reached out to Right Turn for support to date.

Right Turn is committed to providing opportunities to support parents as lifetime learners. There is an abundance of parenting information out there. Sometimes it is a bit more difficult to find information about parenting a child who joined your family through adoption. Our trainings provide advice about how to talk to your child about adoption, navigate open adoption relationships, and parent children who have endured trauma and loss. We also provide details on needs common to adopted adolescents, understanding the viewpoint of all members of the adoption kinship network and much more.

If you are simply looking to talk to other adoptive parents, Right Turn hosts family events and support groups that connect adoptive parents and children to their peers. Trainings and support groups are available to parents at all stages of the adoption process, from your first consideration of adoption through finalization. Services are free to adoptive and eligible guardianship families.

For current support group and training information, visit us at www.RightTurnNE.org, call 888.667.2399, or join our Facebook Support Group.

Encouraging and Supporting Tweens and Teens in Care

Youth in foster care often feel different from their peers, and as they grow into the tween and teen years, chances are that those feelings intensify. During this developmental stage, youth mostly just want to fit in with their friends and peers. At times, being a part of the child welfare system can get in the way of youth feeling like a “typical teen” and increase their sense of feeling different from their peers.

There are a lot of “typical” behaviors that most every teen will experience: rebellion, being demanding, an occasional negative attitude, and an influx of emotional responses to situations and feelings. As a result, going through this particular developmental phase can be a confusing time for all. Add to this being away from your birth family, living in a new, unfamiliar home, and possibly attending an unfamiliar school, and it’s easy to see how those typical tween and teen behaviors can seem exaggerated from time to time for youth in out-of-home care.

No one wants to feel different or singled out, especially teens and young adults. And, like adults, most youth want to feel like they are being listened to and that their feelings are validated. There are a number of ways you can show your support for a tween or teen in your care who is navigating his or her their feelings of being different, and help him or her feel more like a “typical” tween or teen. In most cases, youth in out-of-home care can participate in many of the “normal” coming of age activities just like their peers. However, we recommend discussing these activities with the caseworker for the youth in your care before proceeding.

Participating in extracurricular activities

Whether a youth in your care participates through school or another organization, these groups, teams, and clubs can help him find his peer group. Taking part in an extracurricular activity can help him feel accepted by others and give him the chance to spend time with peers who share a similar interest. Extracurricular activities can also benefit youth as they go on to find a job or post-high school success.

Peer groups

Tweens and teens are trying to find where they fit in and may choose to interact with a variety of peer groups. As a foster parent, you have the opportunity to be a sounding board to guide them through both the positive and the negative experiences they may encounter with their peer groups, such as bullying, peer pressure, loyalty, and reliability. You can help teach them how to ask for help, to have a trusting relationship with adults, and learn how to handle similar situations as they grow and mature.

Searching for a job

An after school or weekend job can help a youth learn responsibility while also gaining some independence. They’ll also learn valuable skills for looking and applying for a job, which will help them in adulthood, too. As a foster parent, you might use this as an opportunity to teach the youth in your care about responsible money management skills, which will be valuable throughout their life.

Dating

This can be a scary word for any parent! However, dating is a very typical part of being a teenager. That said, it is important to keep in mind that youth in care are a vulnerable population and at an increased risk for exploitation. As a foster parent, you can keep the youth in your care safe by monitoring dating activities and modeling healthy relationships; especially if they have not had or witnessed positive relationships in the past. Be open and available to the youth in your care when they have questions pertaining to dating and establishing healthy relationships. With safeguards in place, allowing the youth in your care to explore dating experiences can help them feel empowered to make healthy choices for themselves.

Driving

This is a skill that teens use throughout their lives. However, for teens in out-of-home care, this is an activity that may have some restrictions. Talk with your caseworker, licensing worker, or independent living coordinator for guidance about your licensing agency’s policies around a youth in your home learning to drive and obtaining a driver’s license. If you cannot help teach the teen in your care to drive, you may want to teach him how to safely navigate public transportation, if that is available where you live.

Applying for college

There are a number of scholarships and grants available to youth in care wishing to go on to post-secondary education. Foster parents can help youth look and apply for these and other financial aid that may be available to them to help them afford a college education. Talk with your agency's Independent Living Coordinator, School Counselor and/or caseworker for additional resources and guidance. To apply for federal student aid, loans, and grants, prospective students need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The application helps determine eligibility for federal aid. For additional information on FAFSA visit <https://fafsa.ed.gov/> to fill out a free application.

Being a tween or teen in out-of-home care adds some differences to these experiences. Tweens and teens are trying to figure out who they are and how they fit into the larger world, and being in foster care may add to this struggle to figure out their identity. As a foster parent, the youth in your care will look to you for guidance, support, and understanding. You can be a model for healthy relationships and communication skills. Additionally, you are in a unique role to be able to provide structure, support, advocacy, and guidance to the youth in your care in order to help them thrive during these complex developmental stages in their lives.

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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: 402-989-2197

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

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.

- **Alliance Support Group: Box Butte Community Hospital, in Alliance Room**
6:00-7:30 p.m. Please RSVP to Jolie
Meets the third Thursday of the month.
Nov. 19, Dec. 17, 2015 and Jan. 21, 2016
- **Scottsbluff Support Group: Regional West Medical Center, in South Plaza Room 1204**
6:00-7:30 p.m. Please RSVP to Jolie
Meets the second Tuesday of the month.
Nov. 10, Dec. 8, 2015 and Jan. 12, 2016
- **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 December)
Nov. 10, 2015 and Jan. 12, 2016
- **Lexington Support Group: Parkview Baptist Church (803 West 18th St)**
6:00-8:00 p.m. Contact Terry Robinson
Meets quarterly.
Jan. 26, April 26, July 26 & Oct. 25, 2016
- **FACES-Online Support Group: Every Tuesday 9:00-10:00 p.m. Central Time**
Contact Terry Robinson.
Meets weekly to discuss issues foster parents are facing. Support only.
- **Parenting Across the 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.

Next meeting is November 13 and is a holiday pot luck dinner. Support only.



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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 (resource) families, adoptive families, and relative caregivers
- Opportunity for all foster (resource) 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
- Alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system

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
- I wish to join the effort through a donation.

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

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