

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

May/June 2017

N F A P A

Caring For Yourself As You Care For Children In Foster Care

Dr. John DeGarmo

For the first time in about nine months, I was able to get outside and do some work in the yard. I have been a lifelong gardener, and I often found refuge while gardening; time for myself to reflect, think, and relax. Of late, I had neglected my gardening chores, due in large part to having nine children in the home. I was not making time for the garden, and thus not taking time for myself. As a result, I was becoming worn out, exhausted, and was approaching a burn out that I did not want or need.

As I tackled the job of pruning back the many butterfly bushes in my yard, I felt the stresses and tension that had been in my shoulders the past months quickly slip away. Indeed, it had been a difficult time the past six months, with a house full of children. The latest children in foster care in our home had come with a variety of challenges and needs that were all too demanding of my wife and me. We had both grieved when the two youngest foster children were placed into another home; a home with no children and where the foster parents could completely focus on their many needs. With nine children in our home, my wife and I were spending all our time trying to meet the needs of these two, while almost ignoring the other seven. Perhaps it was best for all if these two were placed into another home; a home that could give them all the support and resources they needed. The oldest foster child stayed with us; a decision that the courts, the case workers, and the teen all felt was best, and one that we so very wanted, as well.

Pruning back the branches and spent flowers from the previous season, I allowed myself the first opportunity in a long time to take some time for myself, doing something I enjoyed. I needed this time alone, and I could tell right away that I would be better for it, and my family would benefit from it, as well. In an almost humorous light, I laughed to myself,

thinking that seven children seemed much easier than nine. Foster parents certainly have a different perspective of things in life.

Without a doubt, foster parenting is hard work! It may just be the hardest work you ever do. You will often find yourself exhausted, both mentally and physically, and feel drained. There is very little money available to help you, and you will not be reimbursed for all the money you spend on your foster child. The job will require you to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with no time off. You will probably feel overworked and underappreciated. You will work with children who are most likely coming from difficult and harmful environments.

Some of these children will have health issues, some will come with behavioral issues, and some will struggle with learning disabilities. Many times, the children you work with will try your patience, and leave you with headaches, frustrations, disappointments, and even heartbreaks. There is a reason why many people are not foster parents, as it



is often too difficult. The turnover rate for foster parents in the United States is between 30% and 50% each year.

I know of some people that become so engrossed in being a parent and taking care of children that their own personal identity disappears over time. Don't neglect who you are and what makes you special. After all, your spouse fell in love with you for who you are! When foster parenting becomes too stressful, you, your family, and your foster child will all feel the effects. Thus, one of the most important reminders for you, as a foster parent, is the fact that you need to take care of yourself, physically, mentally, and emotionally. If you neglect yourself, your family will suffer as a result. Finding time for you will not be easy, but it is very essential. Make time (*Continued on page 3*)

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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Questions? Interested in becoming a member of the Board?

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

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Attention Foster Parents!

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

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will earn .5 credit hours and your name will be entered to win a \$10 Walmart gift card.

You can submit your questionnaire by email to **nichollette@nfapa.org**, by mail to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MayJuneNewsletter2017** We will then send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing.
Good Luck!

1. Fill in the blank. Over half the children in care are _____.
2. Fill in the blank. Around _____ percent of children come into care due to parental neglect.
3. True or False. DHHS is required by law to contact relatives and other people with close connections to the family when a child enters state custody.
4. How many beneficiaries lose their SSI benefits when they turn 18?
5. Name three things parents can do to help a RAD child.
6. Fill in the blanks. It is _____ that young SSI beneficiaries nearing age ____ begin to prepare early.
7. True or False. Starting an SSI application earlier allows for a smoother transition out of foster care for those eligible for SSI as adults
8. True or False. Foster parenting is easy work.
9. Name three things young people want you to know about foster care.
10. True or False. Teens with RAD have abnormal social relationships.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

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(Continued from page 1)

to do something you enjoy, and that you find relaxing. Spend time with some friends, perhaps over lunch or dinner. Do not neglect your own personal health; make sure you get plenty of exercise regularly and eat healthy. If you take time for yourself, you will help to ensure your well being, as you care for others in your own home.

Dr. John DeGarmo has been a foster parent for 14 years, now, and he and his wife have had over 50 children come through their home. He is a consultant to legal firms and foster care agencies, as well as a speaker and trainer on many topics about the foster care system. He is the author of several foster care books, including The Foster Parenting Manual, and writes for several publications, including Fostering Families Today. He can be contacted at drjohndegarmo@gmail.com, through his Facebook page, Dr. John DeGarmo, or at The Foster Care Institute.

Reprinted with permission from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-john-degarmo/caring-for-yourself-as-yo_b_14285082.html

NFAPA Support Groups

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

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

Contact a Resource Family Consultant for more information:

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

Tammy Welker (Columbus): 402-989-2197

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

NFAPA Office: 877-257-0176

IN-PERSON SUPPORT GROUPS

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

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

May 18 & June 15, 2017

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

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

May 9 & June 13, 2017

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

Ridgeview Bible Church, 919 East 10th Street. 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Contact Jolie for dates.

North Platte Support Group: Meets every other month on the first Thursday. Dinner and childcare provided. Registration is required. Contact Terry Robinson to register. Nebraska Children's Home Society - 121 N Dewey St #206.
6:00-8:00 p.m.

June 1, August 3, October 5 & December 7, 2017

Columbus Support Group: Meets the second Tuesday of the month (except July and December). Childcare available. Contact Tammy Welker.

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

Peace Lutheran Church (2720 28th St.). 7:00-8:30 p.m.

May 9, June 13 (Added June due to request from foster parents), August 8, September 12, October 10 & November 14, 2017

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: This group supports and strengthens racial identity in transracial families. Watch our website for further dates or contact NFAPA with any questions. Support only. Contact Whitney Fritzinger at colorlineslincoln@gmail.com to register.

Dates pending. For more info: <https://www.facebook.com/colorlineslincoln/>

**A CHILD WHO
IS IN PAIN WILL SHOW
IT THROUGH BEHAVIOR.**
.....
-DR. LAURA MARKHAM

A Letter from the Executive Director

Felicia Nelsen

May is a special month. Not only is it a beautiful month full of sunny days, blooming flowers and green grass, it is also a month full of celebrations and events. We have holidays like May Day, Mother's Day and Memorial Day but we also have special days everyone looks forward to. Examples are Graduations, Weddings, last day of school and the start of summer vacation. For those of you who do not know, May is also the month where we celebrate National Foster Care Month. This is the time we recognize all those that take part in helping children and youth in foster care.

We have the front line workers that most people think of when someone talks about foster care and those that help in the background making changes to support the families. Those that play a part are the caseworkers, Guardian ad Litem, Judges, Lawyers, Agency workers, support workers and different organizations that help support and advocate for families. But most of all we need to remember the foster parents.

We have foster parents who open up their home and hearts while providing placement and stability in a family setting to meet the needs of a foster child. They are key partners in helping achieve permanency for a foster child by working with birth families and the team while addressing the daily challenges each child has.

We have two types of foster parents, Licensed and Relative/Kinship. Relative/Kinship families are family or close family friends that step up at a moment's notice to maintain a child's connection with their family. Licensed foster parents are those who went through the long licensing process of attending pre-service training, meeting safeguards and continue attending additional in-service hours to prepare themselves with the skills necessary to help an unknown child that comes into their home.

No matter what type of foster parent you are, most people (including friends and family) do not understand all you do and what you are going through when you are a foster parent. As with any parent, it is a 24 hour, 7 day a week responsibility. You work with children that have been traumatized and abused and dealing with the loss of their family. You help these children that struggle with emotional, behavioral and health issues while offering compassion, love and understanding as their family takes the steps to heal. Some days you wonder if you do make a difference. Children are our most valuable resource and when a child is in foster care, it truly does take a village to raise a child.

So as the kids look forward to winding down their school year and long lazy days of summer, be sure to take some time to recognize, celebrate and honor all that you and others do

to help a foster child. Offer an encouraging word to those you know that are helping in whatever way they can to help the children and youth in foster care. You can also attend our Proclamation Signing. NFAPA has asked the Governor to sign a proclamation on May 10 at 10:00 am at the Capitol to recognize all those that are making a difference in these children's lives. You are welcome to come help us celebrate all that you do! We will be having an Open House immediately following at are new office (3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D in Lincoln) and all are invited. Please email me to let us know you can come. I look forward to meeting all of you.

Reactive Attachment Disorder In Teens

5 Reasons Your Teen Isn't Like "All Other Teenagers"

"He's just being a typical teenager," they say. *"He'll outgrow it."* This single sentence exasperates most people raising teens with reactive attachment disorder (RAD). Reactive attachment disorder in teens brings up different issues than for those raising "typical teens". As a parent of a teen with RAD, you know your child has larger battles ahead than many of his peers. Typical responses about your "typical teen" probably make you feel more alone and overwhelmed.



Here's the good news—if people say that you're too strict with your teenager or over react in regard to parental concerns, you're most likely on the right track in your parenting.

Many parents are able to give their children a bit more freedom as they grow from children to adolescents. Teenagers often have the capacity to make more decisions for themselves than when they were younger. For teenagers with RAD, however, this isn't usually the case. Teens with RAD are different from their peers, even if they look the same on the surface.

Here's why teens with reactive attachment disorder aren't "typical teens"—

1. Early trauma changes the brain. Even though teens with RAD may look like other teens on the outside, they have much younger brains. That's because children who were abused or neglected before the age of 5 didn't get opportunities to experience normal early child development. Therefore, they essentially get

“stuck” in the developmental stage of a toddler. They don’t “outgrow” their trauma. Teens with RAD are cognitively and emotionally less mature than their peers. Like a toddler, they will take or do what they desire in the moment without forethought.

2. Healthy attachment contributes to healthy remorse. All teens test limits from time to time. The difference between attached teens and those with RAD is how they feel about their poor choices. Attached teens have the capacity to feel guilty and correct behavior on their own accord. Teens with RAD will continue to make poor choices without empathy for others.
3. Peer influence is more powerful for teens with RAD. It’s normal for teenagers to spend more time with friends as they get older. Those influences, however, impact attached teens differently than those with RAD. Attached teens have regard for their families. Even when they spend a lot of time with peers, they may still make some time for their families. Teens with RAD have little to no attachment to their families and will follow their peers without pause.
4. Teens with RAD have abnormal social relationships. Most attached teenagers learn to successfully navigate relationships outside of their families. However, teens with RAD seek control at all costs to feel safe as a result of early abuse and neglect. This interferes with all of their relationships, including with peers. Therefore, their peer relationships are often short-lived or superficial.
5. Teens with RAD desperately want to attach to others based on their terms rather than to have reciprocal relationships. Therefore, they can develop emotionally and sexually inappropriate relationships. They can get obsessive about relationships. Sexual relationships may be the only way they feel as though another person cares for them.

To raise a teenager who has the mindset of a toddler makes puberty and peer pressure all the more stressful during the teenage years. It’s extremely difficult for parents and their teens. Here are some tips based on our practices here at the Institute for Attachment and Child Development.

Tips for parents raising teens with RAD:

- **Take care of yourself through empathetic parenting.** We recommend the book *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic* by Foster Cline and Jim Fay. Teens with RAD can benefit from empathetic parenting when they are in a good place mentally in which to do so (which is why we utilize the parenting strategy in our program). Empathetic parenting helps children with RAD to accept responsibility and become, as we say at IACD, “family kids”. While some

teens with RAD aren’t at a point where they can benefit from empathetic parenting, their parents still can. Parents often feel less anxious when they can let go of power struggles with their teens and allow them to experience the consequences of their own decisions.

- **Remain calm.** As stated above, remaining calm will allow you greater emotional and mental health. Moreover, a calm environment will help your teen to feel safer. Teens with RAD feel less safe with parents who lose their temper. Angry parents confirm the belief that the world is scary and unreliable. Of course, keeping calm is extremely difficult to do with teens with RAD who know how to “push your buttons”. You have a greater capacity to remain calm when you don’t engage in arguments with your teen. If your child is engaging you in an argument, less is more. Be kind and empathetic but firm and to the point. Tell her that you love her too much to argue and move on.
- **Keep your teen safe.** Again, children with RAD have cognitive and emotional capacities of toddlers. Things that other teens “should do” don’t apply to your child. If you wouldn’t allow your 4-year-old to drive a car, stay home alone, or ride his bike to a friend’s house, we advise against letting your teen with RAD do so. She simply isn’t safe in the same environments and situations in which her peers can venture.
- **Restrict electronics.** Here at IACD, our teens don’t get access to electronics. Social media and the Internet provide too many opportunities for teens with RAD to establish superficial relationships, false identities, and inappropriate emotional and sexual relationships. Furthermore, teens use electronics to create further distance from their families, limiting opportunities to build healthy attachments.
- **Get help from a qualified attachment therapist.** You can’t do this alone. Your love is important but, unfortunately, not enough to heal your child with RAD.

It is wise and necessary for you to recognize that your teen is, in fact, different from her peers. Setting firm limits and parenting with empathy doesn’t mean that you’re limiting your teen’s joy. **On the contrary, you’re helping to keep her safe and to feel safe.** For fun, you can engage your child in conversation about a book you both read, play board games as a family, or watch a family-oriented movie together. Empathetic parenting isn’t about power and control—it’s about respecting and honoring your child’s needs, as well as your own.

The next time someone tells you that you’re too strict with your teen, take a breath, smile, and pat yourself on the back. They can’t understand. You know why you’re doing what you do and that’s all that matters.

Reprinted with permission from: <http://instituteforattachment.org/5-reasons-your-teen-with-reactive-attachment-disorder-isnt-like-all-other-teenagers/>

Helping Young People with Disabilities Successfully Transition to Adulthood

Susan Wilschke, Deputy Associate Commissioner for Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support

The transition to adulthood can be challenging, especially for young people with disabilities who come from low-income families and receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Social Security is with you through life's journey, helping you secure today and tomorrow. Part of that commitment is creating a path for children with disabilities that leads to rewarding lives as adults.

“More than a million children with significant disabilities receive SSI benefits.

More than a million children with significant disabilities receive SSI benefits. During the transition years — generally from ages 14 to 18 and beyond — young people with disabilities ideally gain the knowledge and skills they'll need to achieve independence

and self-sufficiency. They face significant challenges, as many of the resources and services available to young people with disabilities end when they leave the educational system or reach age 18 and are classified as adults. Turning 18 also triggers an important change in SSI benefits: Social Security must make a new determination on their SSI eligibility using the adult disability standards. About one-in-three such beneficiaries lose their SSI benefits.

It's critical that young SSI beneficiaries nearing age 18 begin to prepare early. Social Security has policies, resources, and support in place to help, but many people don't know about them. We recently implemented several new initiatives to help young people and their families prepare for this transition.

We developed a new brochure, *What You Need to Know About Your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) When You Turn 18* (<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11005.pdf>), describing key resources and information for young people receiving SSI. It explains the benefit re-determination at age 18 and special SSI work incentives for people participating in special education, Vocational Rehabilitation, or working while attending school. It also includes information on Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts; health programs; and support from other places, such as American Job Centers. We're mailing the brochure this month (and each year in the future) to all SSI recipients ages 14 to 17.

We also added a new section to the *Red Book*, Social Security's guide to work incentives, consolidating information on programs and resources for young people to help with the

transition from school to adulthood. We encourage young people who receive SSI — and their parents, teachers, service providers, caregivers, or representatives — to use these materials to learn about the many programs and resources available for them.

Social Security also helps young people with disabilities who are about to leave foster care, often at age 18. When foster care ends, they may become eligible for SSI — but in the time period before SSI payments begin, they may be left without any means of support. On August 1, 2016, we expanded the early application period for people leaving foster care from 90 days ahead of the date they leave foster care to 180 days ahead, as a pilot test nationwide (test pilot is for one year). Starting an SSI application earlier allows for a smoother transition out of foster care for those eligible for SSI as adults.

We're also active members of the Federal Partners in Transition workgroup, which develops strategies to promote successful youth transitions. You can visit our website to learn more about what we are doing for transition-age youth:

www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/resources-youth.htm

Give to Lincoln Day

What happens when our community comes together for a day of giving? Great displays of generosity that help our local nonprofits provide needed services and improve our great city.

Since the first Give To Lincoln Day in 2012, thousands of donors have come together to raise more than \$12 million to support Lancaster County nonprofits.

The Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association is participating in this event and every donation NFAPA receives on Give to Lincoln Day will increase because the Lincoln Community Foundation and their participating partners are offering a \$300,000 challenge match pool.

give
To Lincoln Day
May 18, 2017

Please encourage family and friends to donate on May 18th. Get more information at www.givetolincoln.com. Click here to donate to NFAPA: <https://tinyurl.com/jvjs3rw>

When You Realize You Can't "Fix" Reactive Attachment Disorder (And What You Can Do)

As a newly married couple, Angie and Tom didn't plan to have children. "God had very different plans for us, thankfully," said Angie. Today, Angie is a widow with five boys—one biological and four adopted sons. Their family journey has been difficult, to say the least.

When Angie found out her husband had been diagnosed with cancer and only had five more weeks to live, it was obviously devastating for their family. For one of their sons in particular, the diagnosis was particularly troublesome. Her son Joe* had just begun to bond to Tom—a monumental task for a child who'd been abused and neglected for years before Tom and Angie had adopted him.

Tom's death created a downward spiral for Joe from which Angie was afraid he'd never recover. "It was like looking at the same streetwise, need-nobody kid that we picked up in China." All of the progress and attachment Joe seemed to have made in the three years he lived with the Rylands seemed to have been lost. That year, Joe ran away from home, threatened suicide, jumped out of a second-story window with a knife, had numerous run-ins with police, and had to go to an acute care hospital several times. "I began to realize that we had the perfect storm of trauma, loss, abuse, teenage rebellion, and tremendous grief," said Angie. "And I wasn't able to fix any of it."

Angie is right—there's no quick fix for the aftermath of trauma. It doesn't just go away. Children who have been abused and neglected have access to triggers their whole lives. People spend lifetimes working through early trauma.

As little humans, our brains work hard to avoid conflict and pain and to feel joy and relief. The longer the brain practices pain avoidance, the longer it takes for the brain to learn healthier ways to deal with conflict. Therefore, our brains get hardwired for how to navigate relationships early on—either in healthy or non-healthy ways.

Here's the good news, however—people can also learn to manage their PTSD triggers in healthier ways. It is possible for kids with RAD to grow up to have meaningful relationships with friends and family members with the right help.

Parents can't "fix" RAD but here's what they can do:

1. **Don't take behaviors personally.** Children with RAD aren't doing what they do as a personal attack against their parents, although it can certainly feel that way. They are simply relying on primal survival mechanisms they learned early on to push people away and stay safe. To separate the disorder from the child

will help you to stay calm and, therefore, to allow your child to feel safer with you.

2. **Attain a psychiatric evaluation for your child.** Adults who abuse and neglect children often do so as a result of their own mental illnesses. Thus, abused and neglected children typically carry an unfortunate combination of mental illnesses from their biological parents ("nature") and attachment disorders due to their early trauma ("nurture"). A child can't begin to efficiently work on attachment when he's in the midst of battling his mental illness.
3. **Get help for your child from highly specialized family attachment therapists.** Just as you didn't cause or create your child's disorder, you can't fix RAD—love is not enough. Family therapy can help foster connections.
4. **Get help for yourself.** The chaos, stresses, and emotional upheaval of raising children with RAD often result in parents having PTSD too. Those raising children with RAD need to get the professional help and self-care they need in order to effectively parent their children.
5. **Have realistic expectations.** Look at the child through the lens of mental illness. Children with RAD are different from other children without trauma but that doesn't mean they can't heal. Your child's healing may look different from what you once imagined. For example, she may not want you to hold and kiss her but may let you brush her hair or sit on the couch with you.

When children are able to let down their guards and learn that healthy adults will keep them safe through tight structure, they can learn to trust and connect. This is far from easy. **However, attachments are possible with the help of highly specialized attachment therapists and lots of work, patience, and time.**

**name changed to protect identity*

Reprinted with permission from: <http://instituteforattachment.org/when-you-realize-you-cant-fix-reactive-attachment-disorder-and-what-you-can-do/>

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>

Waiting for a Forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.

Name: Seth

17 years old

Happy, playful, and talkative, Seth has many interests including dragons, Pokemon, Dragon Ball Z, playing video games, and listening to all types of music-especially country. Beloved by his peers and caregivers, Seth enjoys dancing, singing, and art, as well as hands-on projects like Legos or costume design for staging plays. Because he is so friendly and social, he needs guidance to make the best choices. Seth will need strong family and therapeutic support throughout his life in order to be successful.

Connections: Seth needs to be supported in maintaining his relationship with his grandmother.



Name: Alana

17 years old

Insightful and introspective, Alana has been through a lot in her life, but once she gets to know and trust you, her fun side comes out and she's a delight to be around. A good helper-especially with younger children-she loves to read, cook, bake, fish, camp, and ride bikes. Alana also likes to play the viola and loves her ice cream.

Alana looks forward to having a Forever Family that is outgoing, welcoming, understanding, and will love her unconditionally. (She also wouldn't mind if they had a few cats for her to play with, too.)

Connections: Alana has relationships with some family members and it will be important that she is supported in maintaining those.



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

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

Phone: 402-504-3673



Proclamation Signing

May 10, 2017 | 10 a.m.

Nebraska State Capitol | Warner Chamber

Luncheon reception immediately following the Proclamation Signing at the new Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association office:

● 3601 N. 25th St. Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521

● For more information and to RSVP, call 877-257-0176 or email felicia@nfapa.org

May is National Foster Care month, a time to recognize that we each can make a difference in the lives of children and youth in foster care.



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/Kearney_Spaulding

First United Methodist Church – Heritage Room
4500 Linden Drive
Kearney, NE

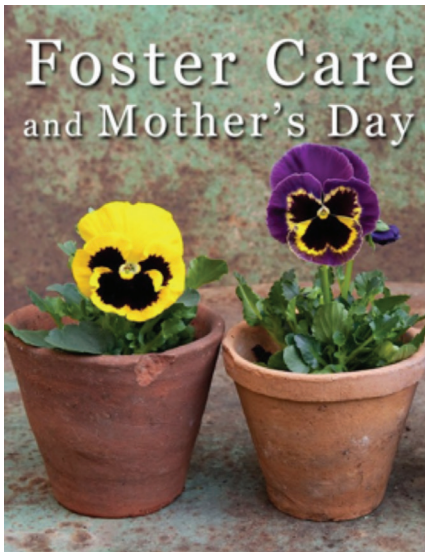
June 2, 2017: 6:00 p.m. -9:30 p.m.

June 3, 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

Foster Care and Mother's Day



My older two kids (adopted through foster care 4 years ago) are starting to reach the age where they no longer come home with school made crafts for me on Mother's Day. It's one of those little bittersweet milestones that I never realized would sting until it happened. Sunrise sunset, and all those things. At least I've still got macaroni necklaces

from kid number 3 to look forward to.

I was thinking back on the school crafts I've been given over the years, and one particular memory popped into my mind. My son was 5, and in preschool at the time. We hadn't adopted him yet, we were *just* the foster parents at that time.

James came home from school the Friday before Mother's Day grinning from ear to ear. Not really understanding the whole Sunday holiday thing, he walked in the door and

instantly presented the gift he had made for me in school that day. A Pansy potted in a styrofoam drinking cup which he had wrapped in construction paper and colored himself.

"I made this for you Erin!" The pride was literally oozing out of him. He called me Erin back then, except he actually pronounced it Eh-win.

He pulled another almost identical flower ever so carefully out of a box in his backpack. "And this one's for my mom at our next visit!"

My heart swelled. I made a mental note to thank his teacher for not forgetting his birth mom. And for not forgetting me either.

Often with foster care it felt like only one of us got to be the mom at a time. I don't think either one of us treated the other that way, that just seemed to be the way of the things. On some days, like court days, she was the mom, and I was just some random lady who had to sit on the bench outside. On other days, like sick days, I was the mom, and I made the kids soup and cuddled them on the couch while she had to anxiously wait for updates from me.

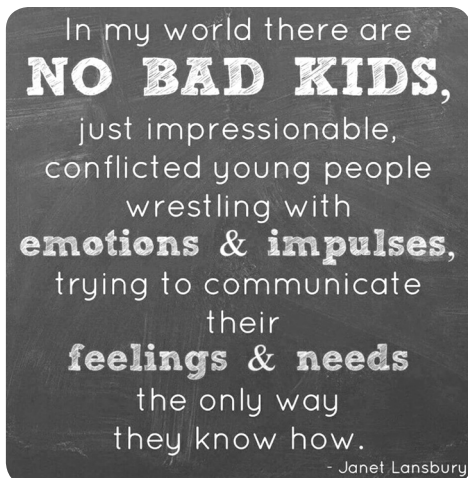
There were many instances over my time as a foster parent where people reminded me in a condescending voice that I was not the mother. Excuse me doctor, can I have a copy of his immunizations for school? *No, the mother has to request them.* Is it okay if we go on vacation to the beach this summer? *You'll have to ask if their mother minds.* I think it might be time for a haircut. *Don't forget to clear it with their mother first.*

I don't doubt that people made comments to her that left her feeling the same way. I imagine that some acted like she wasn't always completely the mother either, because she didn't have custody. Of course I don't know that for certain since I'm not her, but I would assume that on more than one occasion she was made to feel the same way I did.

Partial. Incomplete. Not *the real* mom.

Seeing my son's happiness over his two flowers was a good reminder to me, that no matter what perception the outside world might give, we were and are both 100% his mothers.

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<http://www.nobohnsaboutit.com/2016/05/foster-care-and-mothers-day/>



Her name was Jesus Christ

Stacy Gagnon



She was 5-years-old with dirt stained, knobby knees protruding from shorts that were a few sizes too big. Her thick, black hair was caught in a pink, plastic barrette. The grime on her legs and arms was layers deep from being homeless and camping in the woods. I knelt down to greet her, but she spun past me and whirled unseeing around the entry way before she beelined for the dollhouse. Not a word, not a glance, and not a

single acknowledgement of a new environment. She sat rocking and singing with a wooden doll in her left hand. Her play had no purpose, her eyes took in everything; but saw nothing.

DCS (Department of Child Safety) had called hours earlier about two children sitting in their office. A 5-year-old autistic girl and her 18-month old brother. They asked if I was the home who took in special needs children. The children had recently been placed in a foster home, but they said the girl child was

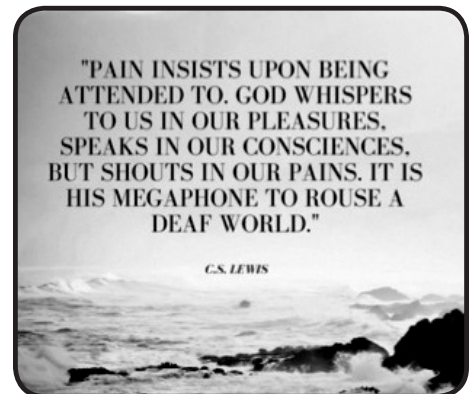
too difficult to handle and...did we mention she was autistic? Against all reason and judgement, I said, "yes".

I meet lots of families who have considered foster care and adoption. Many tell me things like, "I could adopt a baby, but not if they have been exposed to drugs or alcohol." Or "It wouldn't be safe to take in a child that has been touched inappropriately". I once said these same things as well.

When we decided to do foster care, I quickly made a mental list of all the children and needs that I felt I could handle. I pictured a single school-aged child living in my home and happily attending school alongside my children. I was ready to jump in with selfless sacrifice, but I had a few conditions that needed to be met. I felt couldn't handle a drug-exposed baby or special needs children. I was scared to deal with drug-addicted bio parents. It would not be safe to have any child that had been sexually abused or one that had been exposed to adult things. And if I wanted to get specific: no cursing, property destruction, attachment issues; my checklist was quite lengthy.

I highlight these embarrassing truths because I am not a perfect parent, nor am I a saint. I set out to do foster care with my selfish conditions to serve selflessly. I needed to be taught a huge lesson because **God speaks in our conscience, but it would take experiencing pain to wake me up.**

After DCS left, I decided to take the 5-year-old with me to the grocery store because, I needed diapers for her brother and I was out of milk. As we walked each aisle, she flapped and spun around my cart. She reminded me of a hummingbird, never still, searching, frenetic energy escaping a tiny body. My mind started to call her little bird, as she hummed to music no one else could hear. We stood in the check-



out line and the cashier looked down and said, "Hi sweet girl, what's your name"? The child stopped her movement, her gaze became intent on the cashier and she yelled, "my name is Jesus Christ". And then she began flapping and rocking, and chanting 'Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ', over and over. The store became quiet as she grew louder. Funny thing with situations like this.... the louder she got, the quieter everyone became. I smiled red-faced, paid the cashier and headed out the door. Once safely sitting in our car, I turned in my seat and looked at her as she rocked back and forth, a nervous giggle escaped my lips as I thought, "wow, I'm fostering Jesus Christ".

I have found with foster care, there is actually a routine to the addition of a family member. You add new children to your home and there is a jumbling and jockeying as everyone melds and molds to a new normal. There are moments in the

beginning that you are walking on a shifting surface of fear, sorrow, and anger. With every kid, the first few weeks always felt like panic mixed with mayhem and doubt, and the days roll by where you are just surviving. But then, you wake up one day and you look at all the kids and it all seems to be working and everyone is not just surviving, but actually thriving. And it's addicting. There is absolutely nothing you can purchase on this earth that can fill you like witnessing a broken, trauma-filled child settle into family and truly laugh, or genuinely love; that's the stuff that keeps you moving forward.

And this child, our little bird who called herself Jesus Christ, started to calm down and her pace seemed to slow and steady out. We developed a new normal as she started Kindergarten and routine steadied her. She still had many moments where she would retreat deep into her mind, with flapping, and rocking. But she always returned and the moments became fewer and farther apart.

Months rolled by and this little bird began to speak and interact more with her brother and our family. She still was fearful and her eyes missed nothing. And through her voice, her actions and the court testimony of her biological mother; her story began to take shape. And when I heard what she endured, I tasted dark anger and fear.

Hers was a story of horrible abuse and terror. And we began to understand how the human brain will shut down and operate from the most basic level of fight or flight; and how these behaviors can mimic autism. Her five-year-old body had been abused and her little mind was surviving in the moment. She had lived homeless with her addicted mother who camped in the woods oblivious to the liberties being taken with her daughter. And my heart was horrified as she flinched every time I tucked her in, or she cried silent tears in the bathtub as I washed her hair. Just holding her 5 year old body and feeling it quiver with fear was enough to undo me. I ached to take her pain away, and it was a long process before she allowed me to truly hug or hold her. And painstakingly she began to trust and heal.

I am learning on this journey that what I think I'm capable of, or what I believe to be safe is not necessarily what God is calling me to. In my mind's eye, I was going to have children come live with me and love was going to fix them. "Sunshine and love", that's all they needed. And as with life, reality is a brick wall in the blind race of good intention. When you live with children from hard places, you will see things a lot differently and you will experience things you wish you could insulate your mind from. I remember visiting a possible foster placement in the hospital. Her nasal septum and her teeth had been pulled out by pliers. She was 5 years old and had lost her hearing because of the beatings she received. As I helped dress her for the day, thick scars laced her back and clumps of hair were missing. I gagged down my sobs and plastered a smile on my lips as she turned to me. All day I sat with her and played trying to hold it together. I drove home after the visit and sat sobbing in my

shower. And I didn't know where to put this. Is there a part of my brain where I could hide the unthinkable? "God!" I cried, "how do I fix this?" I wept over my ineptitude and lack of ability to help. And it's taken me many years to understand that I can't take it away, or fix it.

For a child, the pain and heartbreak is destructive and consuming. I realize that I am better equipped to bear pain, and by opening myself to their story, their tears and sadness, I help carry their burden. I had spent my whole life trying to avoid pain, not realizing that



pain dropped me to my knees and drew me closer to God. And pain also afforded me the opportunity to be human; yes, broken and human before others. Ugly tears wading in the messes and brokenness shared. Reaching across a table and gripping fingers as I pour out my pain. Sharing on this blog, how the images, the knowing, the pain has at times rendered me speechless and lost. And how pain knows no race, no economic class, no borders... and when you're sitting in the middle of it, it's a wasteland of stumbling. And with children they need an adult to share their pain with; a place that is safe to unload and piece through it. Because there is now way to walk around pain and sorrow, it must be endured and lived through. And there's no greater gift than to grip a child's hand and walk with them through the shame, the guilt, the anger, the sorrow, the fear; because hope lies on the other side.

And here's where I struggle, when I share my pain there are times I receive rejection. and it has been a conscious choice to continue to be open and exposed because I will not remain silent, nor do I care if the stories offend. Because people, we are absolutely called to wade out into the muck and the mire; not sit insulated and safe in a pew.

Foster care and adoption is a marathon of faithfulness, not a sprint of success and achievement. And there will be children that cannot be healed. Children who will never succeed in the classroom or on the ball field. There will be diagnoses that seem impossible and daily life that's exhausting. There are hurts too deep to reach and wounds that are not compatible with family life. This is not something we talk about, because we might scare away someone thinking about foster care and adoption. But, I don't believe that this means failure. I believe you leap into this with a measuring stick of faithfulness. And love is a choice, not an outcome based on performance. And success in foster care and adoption is measured in tiny steps of faithfulness through shadowy valleys and mountaintop highs.

Faithfulness is loving the child that may never truly love you

back.

Faithfulness is realizing that the alcohol she was exposed to in-utero means she will struggle to hold a job, balance a check book and understand cause and effect; but you can see the absolute prize in her character and joy.

Faithfulness is sitting in a developmental clinic and hearing how the boy scores horribly low in achievement for his age, but you remind them that he sure knows a lot about loving others.

Faithfulness is walking the valleys with the 5-year-old child who never had autism. It's standing in your driveway trying not to double over and ugly cry as they pull away. It is watching your heart peering over the backseat with a tiny, scared and lonely face as she goes home to family.

Faithfulness is sobbing in the shower, and knowing that God may not fix this.

It's sitting in your car at midnight holding the drug-exposed newborn so his cries don't wake the whole house.

Faithfulness is packing the bag and holding back tears as you fold the tiny t-shirt you have washed countless times and realizing it's not yours to wash anymore.

It's saying yes to adopting a child you have never met in a country far away, no matter the cost, no matter the outcome.

Faithful is embracing the child you were once afraid to have live in your home; and realizing how lucky you were to have the privilege of loving that child.

It's taking Jesus Christ to the grocery store.

Faithfulness is foster care.

Faithfulness is adoption.

Reprinted with permission from: <http://www.ransomforisrael.com/her-name-was-jesus-christ/>

Children, A Poem

I just got back from delivering a key note address at a foster child fundraising event, and while I was traveling, I came across this poem; one I wanted to share with you. Here it is....

Children

by Ina Hughes

*We are responsible for children
who put chocolate fingers everywhere,
who like to be tickled,
who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants,
who sneak popsicles before supper,
who can never find their shoes.*

*And we are responsible for children
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an x-rated world.*

*We are responsible for children
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,*

*who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish,
who cover themselves with Band-aids and sing off key,
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink,
who slurp their soup.*

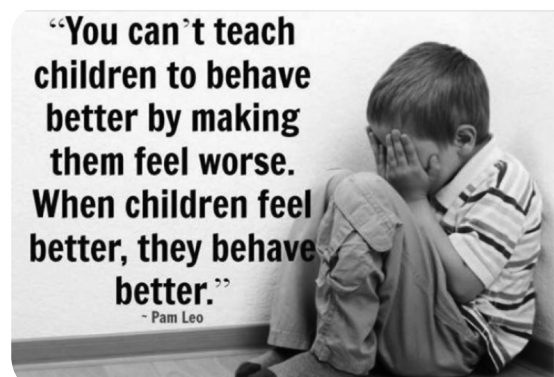
*And we are responsible for children
who never get dessert,
who have no blanket to drag behind them,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who can't find any bread to steal,
who don't have any rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
whose monsters are real.*

*We are responsible for children
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse out the tub,
who get no visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at, and
whose smiles can make us cry.*

*We are responsible for children
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who have never seen a dentist,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
who live and move, but have no being.*

*We are responsible for children
who want to be carried and for those who must,
for those we never give up on and
for those who don't get a second chance,
for those we smother, . . . and
for those who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it.*

Thank you, my friend, for caring for children in need!
-Dr. John DeGarmo



8 Things All Kids In Foster Care Want People To Know

Amma Mante

Every year during National Foster month, the president issues an annual proclamation praising the contributions of the child welfare professionals, and foster parents looking after the 400,000 children who are in the US foster care system.

No doubt some of these adults are pretty awesome, but for me, the real heroes are the brave young people who pack up their whole world in a trash bag to go and live with people who are in most cases, complete strangers.

They are placed in foster families, institutions or group homes. More than a quarter of all foster care placements are in kinship placements, where a child is placed with relatives.

I had the privilege of working with children in foster care for over three years. I was involved with a committee consisting of children in foster care and former foster youth transitioning out the system. These incredibly insightful and astute young people, were advocates for foster care rights and reform.

I heard how their voices were often given the least value or weight when important decisions about their life were being made, and how frequently their input was entirely bypassed. They spoke of feeling like extraneous cogs in a big wheel that went on around them. Some hid the fact they were in foster care for as long as they could from their peers, because people treated them differently once they knew they were “foster kids.”

Despite all the academic and professional training I had, I learned the most about children in foster care through those young people. Here are eight things I learned that young people in foster care really want you to know.

1. “We come from diverse family backgrounds.”

Over half the children in care are minorities. Although a disproportionate amount come from impoverished families, many have middle class backgrounds.

Some of these young people who come from well-respected communities and suffer abuse from their parents, are made to feel like their struggles are not as “important” as those children who come from less well-off families.

Every 47 seconds, a child in the US suffers from neglect or abuse, and it cuts across every social and racial barrier. No community is immune or free from this social ill.

2. “Our parents aren’t perfect, but they’re ours.”

Sure, there are some unashamedly monstrous parents who abuse and intentionally inflict harm upon their children in unimaginable ways. However, many more are simply broken adults.

They are poorly equipped to take care of themselves, let alone their children. They are individuals battling demons of mental ill health, drug and alcohol addiction. Very often, they were struggling to break free from the cycle of abusive relationships or the lingering effects of their own traumatic childhoods.

The thing you need to remember is that to you they may just look like a screwed up, terrible excuse for a parent; but to those kids, that person means the world. Despite the anger that a lot of them felt, they didn’t stop loving their parents.

3. “The adults messed up, we didn’t.”

I’ve lost count of the times teachers and parents of other kids formed fears or prejudices of a child, predicated on a perennial assumption that they had done something pretty terrible to wind up in care.

Around 75 percent of children come into care due to parental neglect. These young people often carry around a whole lot of guilt at the failure to hide the signs of their neglect from the authorities or not being able to make their primary caregiver “better.” The last thing they need is for other people to add to this, by assuming they’re in care as a result of their own actions.

4. “We have dreams and ambitions”.

The negative impact frequent school moves has on their education is rarely factored in to decisions about placement changes. It comes as no surprise that only half of all foster care children fail to graduate from high school, and only 3 percent will graduate from college.

Most states do not provide job training, counseling or any type of continuing support for foster care kids when they turn 18. A lot of child welfare professionals and foster carers are satisfied if they simply show up to classes and make their curfew.

They are failed by a lukewarm system with low expectations that doesn’t even believe in itself. Some of the most bright and talented young people will not fulfill their potential, because no one cared enough to push them to do better.

What’s crazy is that we take these children from parents who we deem incompetent. Then when young people age out the system, we expect them to either fall back on those same parents for support and guidance.

It’s time we stop labeling and limiting our youth, and started uplifting and supporting them instead. Most loving parent’s don’t withdraw all support from their children the minute they reach 18, so why do we do that to the ones in care?

5. “The system isn’t working for us.”

The whole legitimacy of the system is rooted in the belief that the alternative, letting them carry on in unhealthy families, would be cruel.

We have this idea that by removing children from their inept parents, we are rescuing them. In some cases, that's totally correct. 450 children are killed by their parents each year, and the number of these tragedies would most likely be higher if it weren't for the foster care system.

So we can all sleep easy knowing that we are always doing the right thing by removing these children, right?

Well yeah, except one huge problem: Children who have been in foster report significantly worse mental health, employment, housing and education outcomes than those who suffered a similar level of neglect or abuse that remained within the family home.

The broken foster care system is traumatizing to our children, who are 12 times more likely to be prescribed psychotropic drugs than children not in care. While the scrutiny is directed at the natural parents, a research by the Casey Family found one in three children in their study had been abused while in foster care, and the system has long been criticized as a pipeline to human trafficking and incarceration.

6. **"Sometimes we just have regular kid problems."**

As huge of a deal as being in foster care is, it doesn't eclipse who they are. Being in foster care doesn't mean they get a pass on the everyday issues that bother other children. They will still have exam anxiety, fights with friends, broken hearts and first crushes, insecurities and weaknesses, good days and bad days, and of course, puberty.

And yeah, there will be moments when being foster care will affect their relationships and everyday handling of normal life but you know what? Sometimes, it's not all about being a foster kid.

7. **"Adoption does not equal goals."**

Foster care is often viewed as the wilderness that some unlucky children are destined to trail through until they reach the promised land of Adoption. Only one-fifth will go on to be adopted, while over half will return to their homes. That's sad, right?

Wrong.

This may be come as surprise to you, but not every young person wants to be adopted. Many live with the hope of being reunified with their family, and if that is not possible, they desire a long term stay with their foster family. I once attended a party held by an

"Despite all the academic and professional training I had, I learned the most about children in foster care through those young people."

effervescent trio of siblings and their foster mother to celebrate when the state agreed they could remain with her indefinitely.

They were old enough to remember their real parents and the thought of having to start again with another family, changing their last names, calling another adult mom or dad, was less than appealing. Stability with one loving and secure foster care family was often valued by young people, as much, if not more than adoption.

Too many children are languishing in foster care, but they don't need to be. They can thrive in foster care. For all the glaring faults of the system, I have witnessed remarkable transformations in children who were placed with caring and compassionate competent foster families. Where family reunification is simply not possible, foster care can work.

We need to stop seeing foster care as the red headed stepchild of the child welfare system, and realize the important role that long term foster placement can play in enriching, rebuilding and bettering the lives of children in crisis.

8. **"We're not 'just' foster kids."**

Perhaps this is the most important thing they need you to know. Foster kids aren't actually "foster kids." They are young people who happen to have experienced foster care. What they are not, is a monolith with uniform feelings or responses on every issue. The experience of being in foster care will undoubtedly leave an indelible imprint on their lives, but the way in which every young person's journey and future will be shaped by it will vary.

Their case notes only provide a snapshot of their lives and background. It will never tell the whole story. The largeness of who they are cannot be contained within those files.

At the beginning, it was easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges that faced them, and underwhelmed by the tepidity of the system.

However, I was inspired by their resilience, fortitude and tenacity amidst constant changes and upheavals and their immense capacity to adapt to new situations. They are all uniquely sentient, nuanced and complex young people with their special set of quirks and habits, weaknesses and strengths, gifts and talents and fears and aspirations.

Each and every single young person in foster care is a courageous individual with something to say.

Listen to them.

Reprinted with permission from: <http://elitedaily.com/life/kids-in-foster-care-want-you-to-know/1492485/>

The Kinship Connection

Presented by the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association



Relatives and friends are the most natural resources there are to help and support bio-parents and children in need of out-of-home care. Therefore, DHHS is required by law to find and contact relatives and other people with close connections to the family when a child enters state custody.

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Saturday, June 3, 2017: Sidney
Saturday, June 10, 2017: Columbus
Tuesday/Thursday, June 13 & 15, 2017: Lincoln
Saturday, June 17, 2017: McCook

Saturday, July 8, 2017: Omaha
Saturday, July 8, 2017: Beatrice
Saturday, July 8, 2017: North Platte
Saturday, July 15, 2017: Grand Island
Saturday, July 15, 2017: Fremont

Saturday, August 5, 2017: Lincoln
Saturday, August 26, 2017: Kearney
Monday, August 28, 2017: Omaha

Saturday, September 9, 2017: Omaha
Saturday, September 16, 2017: North Platte
Saturday, September 23, 2017: Lincoln
Saturday, September 30, 2017: Wayne

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

I am with _____ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- ☐ **Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
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