

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

May/June 2025

N F A P A

STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING SIBLING CONNECTIONS

Written by Christine Carter

Siblings get separated for many reasons when involved with the child welfare system. It could be a matter of available foster homes. Sometimes, one sibling must go into foster care, but another remains with the family. Other times, a sibling ages out of the foster system or was previously adopted before another sibling came into care. Still, other times, siblings may come into care simultaneously but are adopted by different families. While most foster professionals try to keep siblings together and avoid these situations, separation still happens. How can you support sibling connections for the children in your care?

Why Sibling Connections Matter

Sibling relationships are often the longest-lasting relationships we experience. They can be our confidantes, partners in mischief, and comfort in chaos. Additionally, kids who endure removal from their homes to foster care will often find solace and familiarity when they share the experience with a sibling. They can maintain a connection to their family's identity and culture and continue building memories together that keep them connected and inform their identity.

We know that supporting connections between siblings, whether in a foster or adoptive placement, can benefit the kids. However, supporting these connections falls mainly on the adults in their lives. You should consider several factors when planning to support sibling connections if the kids are separated.



Are you open to the effort and the emotional load that connection may require?

Is communication between siblings even an option?

Are visits an option? What other contacts can you consider if not visits?

How close in age are the siblings?

Did they have a deep bond before the separation?

Do the siblings currently know that each other exists?

Are the parents or caregivers of the other child(ren) willing to work with you for these connections?

Strategies for Maintaining Sibling Connections

There are strategies helpful for initiating and

supporting sibling connect, but many of them depend on the adults in these children's lives for facilitation and consistency. You must be confident that their sibling connection is essential for these kids. Here are a few things to consider when working out how to initiate and support sibling connections.

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521

402-476-2273, toll-free 877-257-0176, e-mail: Felicia@nfapa.org
www.nfapa.org.

NFAPA Staff

Felicia Nelsen, Executive Director: 877-257-0176 or

Felicia@nfapa.org

Corinne O'Brien, Program Coordinator: 402-476-2273 or

Corinne@nfapa.org

Sabrina Nelsen, Program Coordinator: 402-476-2273 or

Sabrina@nfapa.org

Tammy Welker, Northeastern/ Eastern Area RFC: 402-989-2197 or

Tammy@nfapa.org

Robbi Blume, Northwestern Area RFC: 402-853-1091 or

Robbi@nfapa.org

Terry Robinson, Central RFC & Southwest RFC: 402-460-9177 or

Terry@nfapa.org

Vicki Chandler-Smith, Western RFC: 308-352-6079 or

Vicki@nfapa.org

*RFC=Resource Family Consultant

President:

Tammy Wells

308-928-3111

tammy3wells@gmail.com

Northern Representative

Kelly Muchmore

402-270-9951

Kellym246@gmail.com

Vice-President

Amanda Neal

402-804-0147

mandafaye75@yahoo.com

Eastern Representative

Kathi Plato

402-680-9565

kplato10@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer

Kristine Ray

402-613-3409

KristineRay01@live.com

Western Representative:

Southwest

Vacant

Western Representative:

Panhandle

Vacant

Southeast Representative

Tracy Wright

402-730-1576

mstracymarie457@gmail.com

At Large Board Members

Kimberly Barnes

402-612-1595

kbarnes0102@yahoo.com

Central Representative

Vacant

Questions? Interested in becoming a member of the Board?

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

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Attention Foster Parents!

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

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

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Corinne@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MayJun2025>

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. List 8 Strategies to Support Sibling Connections.
2. Fill in the Blanks. _____ relationships are often the longest-lasting relationships we
3. List Six Essentials for Welcoming a Child
4. Fill in the blank. Research shows that kids who have experienced trauma are often _____?
5. List 5 Ways you can help your teen manage Social Anxiety.
6. True or False. Breathing exercises can help your child stay calm and reduce stressful feelings.
7. True or False. Often, children are rejecting because they lack the skills to express their wants and needs in a more adaptive way.
8. Fill in the Blank. If our child is the _____, we still want to encourage perspective taking. 9. Fill in
9. Fill in the Blank. _____ is a developmental process that we can nurture and Encourage.
10. True or False. When we ask too much of children too soon, we can Inadvertently provoke self-criticism and shame.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

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When Caregivers Disagree

Sadly, the caregivers of your child's sibling may not be on the same page about the importance of their sibling connection. If you are facing this situation, consider how to engage in some honest conversations about your differing opinions. Be curious about why they feel unable or unwilling to support connection. If you cannot have those discussions, or they are reluctant to do so, consider sharing your contact information with them in case their circumstances or perspectives change. It's always better to leave an open door than to burn a bridge, even if it's painful and difficult to accept their standpoint.

When The "Best Interests of The Children" Differ

Additionally, recognize that sometimes it may not be in one child's best interest to have contact with a sibling at this time. This does not mean a connection will never be appropriate, and you don't have to see it as written in stone. The safety of all the involved children must always be paramount, but leaving space for healing, growth, and change should also be part of the conversations.

Again, the adults involved can collaborate to keep the lines of communication open. Then, if the situations change or the children want to reestablish a relationship in the future, the adults can assist.

8 Strategies to Support Sibling Connections

1. Find out who your child's siblings are and where they are.

Make it a priority to ask your caseworkers for contact information as soon as you know this child has siblings. Quite often, the earlier the connections are initiated, the more likely they are to stay current.

2. Try to foster communication between siblings.

Encourage regular communication through phone calls, video chats, emails, or old-fashioned cards and letters in the mail. Building time for this connection into your family's regular routine can look like "Picture/Letter Time" every Thursday after school or video calls on Wednesday nights before bed. Whatever works, try to help them stay connected and maintain a sense of closeness.

3. Maintain regular communication between adults.

Try to establish a relationship with the other parents soon after your child joins your home. When you reach out, express your belief that it would be best for the kids to have contact. Ask open-ended questions about how the other parents see this working out and be willing to dialogue, negotiate, and compromise to settle on a working plan that helps you all get started.

4. Try to share photos and life updates regularly.

Your efforts in this area will be critical if or when in-person contact is not an option. Consider your child's age and understanding of the relationship. Try to give your child a voice in what to share, pictures to send, or experiences to share.

5. Whenever possible, try to plan sibling visits.

While geographical distance may complicate things, these in-person opportunities for your child and their siblings are beneficial. You might find yourself initiating first calls, texts, invites, etc., and you should work out how to be okay with that. You can start with easy invites for a sibling to attend your child's sports event or school play. Suggest a playdate at a park between your families' homes. If the other parents are comfortable, you could invite your child's sibling for a sleepover. No matter the event, be sure to take plenty of pictures and share them with the sibling's parents or caregivers!

6. Seek out and support the siblings' shared interests.

They may be both good at basketball. Could you get them on the same team? Do they both have an interest in photography? You could offer to pick up your child's sibling so the kids can take a photography class together. These shared interests and activities create a common ground that makes connecting easier for the kids.

7. Expand your definition of family.

Consider including your child's sibling and their family in your family's events. By including them, you help your child recognize that their sibling is family to you, too. Invite the sibling to birthday parties, send birthday gifts to the sibling(s), and include their family in your traditions and holiday gift exchanges. Intentionally look for opportunities to live a more expansive definition of family so your child and their siblings



understand the value of these connections.

8. Recognize that having contact might not be in the sibling's best interest.

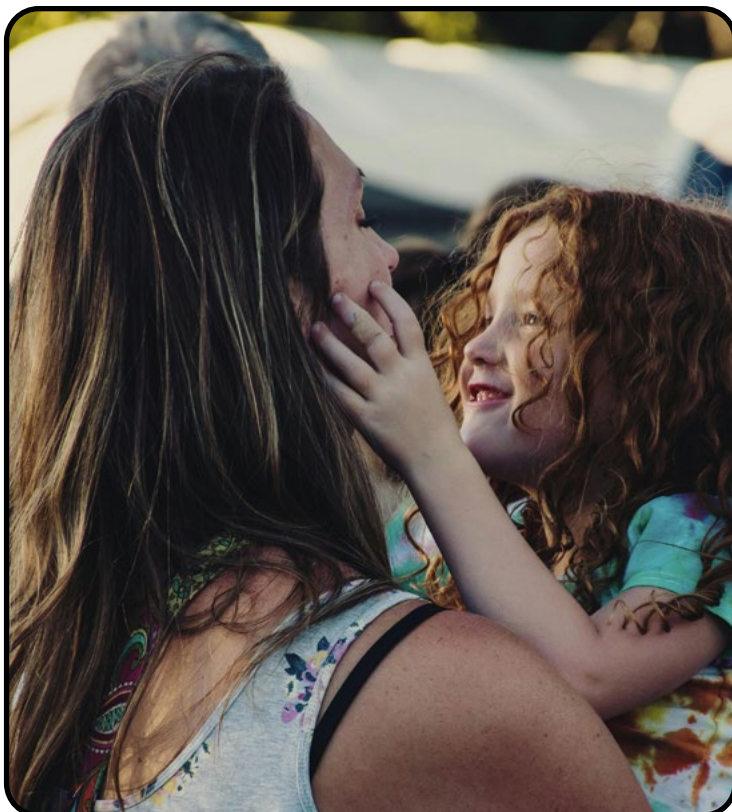
Or having contact right now. Or that contact could be in the best interest of one child but not of the other sibling because that child may be processing life and trauma at a different pace. The other child's caregiver or parents may not be in the same place of understanding or readiness that you are. One of the hardest things you may face is allowing the other family the grace of time to set what they see as necessary boundaries. No matter, try to always leave the door open for communication between the adults, with room to try later for connection between the kids if things change.

Keep the Connection Between You and Your Child Strong

No matter what level of connection your child and their sibling get to experience right now, remember that your priority is to make sure your child feels safe, secure, and cherished. When they may struggle with missing their siblings and feel big emotions around the absence of that relationship, reinforce the messages that they are valued and worthy of loving. When they are enjoying a connection with a sibling, rejoice with them and praise the great things you see growing between them and their sibling.

Intentionally nurturing a secure attachment between you and your child will be an excellent buffer for the ups and downs that will naturally occur in the connection between siblings who live separately.

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6 ESSENTIALS FOR WELCOMING A CHILD TO YOUR FAMILY

Creating a Family.org was fortunate to enjoy interacting with the late great Dr. Karyn Purvis on a few of our early podcasts, and each time, we learned something new. This week marks nine years since she passed away. In her honor, we're sharing six essential things she urged all families to focus on when welcoming a new child into their home. As you will see, she had a gift for simplifying deep concepts and teaching others how to implement them to help a child thrive.

6 Essentials for Welcoming a Child

Whether a child comes to you through adoption, fostering, or agreeing to raise a relative's child, they need to know they are safe and treasured. Building security so they can trust you requires more than a clean, safe bed and regular meals. Their hearts and minds need attention that they may have missed in their earlier years. Their bodies also need time, resources, and space to catch up.

These six essentials will help you target your intentions and efforts and give you a solid foundation for building the attachment that will help them flourish. We've fleshed them out from Dr. Purvis's original one- or two-sentence "quick" tips format to help you catch the full intent while welcoming this child.

1. Give your child the gift of you.

Spend focused time with this child. If you can manage it, try to spend a minimum of 6 weeks at home with a newly adopted child. Don't rush them into school or daycare if you can help it.

When you are home together, offer copious and repetitive opportunities for face-to-face time. Play card games, sing and dance in the kitchen, tell stories, and read books. Do things they love. Introduce them to things the rest of your family enjoys. If face-to-face is too intimate for them at the start, ease them into it by starting with side-by-side, fun, and focused time.

Parenting a Child Exposed to Trauma

2. Provide food and hydration every 2 hours.

Focus on fueling this child frequently for at least the first 6 months. Did you know research shows that kids who have experienced trauma are often chronically dehydrated? To start, offer them what they will eat or drink. Try not to worry too much about nutritional value, especially if it means they won't touch it. Later, you can introduce new foods slowly once you have established trust.

3. Provide a physical or sensory activity every 2 hours.

When you welcome a child who has experienced a lot of change, chaos, or loss, you should expect that they will have

big feelings that they don't know how to manage. Big feelings with nowhere to go can turn into big, challenging behaviors. Preventatively offer opportunities to get their bodies moving and their minds settled with various physical activities and sensory experiences. A few examples could include:

- jumping jacks
- biking
- trampolines
- kitchen dance parties
- fidget toys
- backyard soccer
- sensory buckets
- finger painting

4. Assume they are emotionally younger than their age.

One of the typical impacts of trauma, early childhood losses, and prenatal substance exposure is a delay in emotional development. Assume that your child is about forty percent behind their chronological age. When you approach your new child with this assumption, you can more easily expect them to behave according to their emotional age and thus accept it.

5. Focus on saying yes more often than saying no.

Many kids impacted by trauma will interpret "no" as an outright rejection of their whole person, not just the request they are making. To build up their trust and ability to handle a loving, necessary "no," you will have to offer many more responses of "yes" than "no." A good rule of thumb is to say 7 "yeses" to every "no."

You might need to get creative with turning a "no" into something that feels like and sounds like a "yes," so be patient while practicing. Re-directs or "let me think about that for a minute" are excellent "stalling tactics" you can try while you get the hang of saying "yes" more often!

6. Read up on sensory processing issues.

One of the hallmarks of the late Dr. Purvis's work is her understanding of the sensory processing issues that children experience because of trauma, loss, neglect, or institutional living.

You can start with Dr. Purvis's book, *The Connected Child*,* but here are a few other resources to help educate yourself:

*The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorders** by Carol Kranowitz, M.D.

*Riley the Brave's Sensational Senses: Help for Sensory and Emotional Challenges** by Jessica Sinarski

*Parenting Traumatized Children with Developmental Differences** by Dr. Sara McLean

Depending on your child's needs, preferences, and tolerance, you could investigate resources like baby massage or the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol. YouTube also offers many instructional videos to support kids with sensory challenges. Please consult a physical or occupational therapist or check

with your pediatrician for a reliable recommendation.

Additional Resources from Dr. Karyn Purvis

We are grateful for the opportunities we had to learn from Dr. Purvis. If you haven't seen these resources, we recommend you check them out this week. Our community of parents and caregivers owe so much to her pioneering work and unflagging belief that each precious child can heal and thrive when their needs are understood and met by prepared, educated adults who love them.

Healing After Abuse and Neglect (a CreatingaFamilyEd.org course)

Maintaining a Strong Marriage While Raising Kids Impacted by Trauma (article)

Raising Children from Foster Care or Orphanages (archived podcast)

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CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS: WHY WE SHOULDN'T EXPECT KIDS TO SELF-REGULATE TOO SOON

Dr. Mona Delahooke

Five-year-old Nathan was excited about a family outing to the zoo, but his mother worried he would not be able to control his behavior. So she explained her carefully devised plan. She had ten gummy bear candies with her. If Nathan behaved well, she would give him all ten at the end of the visit. Each time he misbehaved, though, he would lose one.

After just half an hour, Nathan was down to five gummy bears. Then he tossed French fries at his brother at lunchtime, and his mother told him he was down to three. Upset, Nathan leaned back in his chair so far it toppled over, much to his mother's chagrin.

Unfortunately, her plan was doomed from the start. Why? It was based on a false assumption: that Nathan was capable of controlling his behavior. Amidst the popular focus on "self-regulation" among professionals, educators and parents, too often we miss a significant point: we cannot really teach a child to self-regulate. **Self-regulation is a developmental process that we can nurture and encourage in one way: through the experience of emotional co-regulation with caring and attuned adults.**

So how do children develop the capacity for self-regulation? Over time, as a child experiences what it feels like to have his or her emotional and physical needs met, she develops a robust brain-body connection, which, in turn enables the child to

exercise “top-down” control of behaviors and emotions. Children start acquiring this capacity at age three or four, and continue to develop it throughout childhood.

But the ability to self-regulate requires the brain development that helps kids carry it out. If we expect children to control their behaviors when they lack the foundation in their brain-body connection, we are asking for the impossible. And unfortunately, we expect the impossible from too many children who don’t yet have the neurodevelopment in place to self-regulate.

Too often we base our expectations of children on a false assumption: that children possess “top-down” control that allows them to think about their bodies and minds and control their behaviors. The truth is that many behaviorally challenged children don’t yet have this ability.

Parents tend to believe that if a child sometimes displays control, then the child always has the ability to do so. That mistaken belief reveals an expectation gap—a disparity between adults’ assumptions and a child’s abilities.

When children lack top-down control, we need to start with emotional co-regulation—when caring, attentive adults notice and attend to a child’s physical and emotional needs. We do this through relationships. In my subspecialty, infant mental health, we call this approach “the therapeutic use of self.”

In other words, we help build a child’s brain from the bottom-up. If a child has chronic difficulties controlling emotions or behaviors, it’s a sign that her top-down foundation is weak. She needs loving, attuned and non-judgmental adults who “see” her suffering. **It’s these relationships that support a child’s ability to gain emotional and behavioral self-control.**

Too many educational and social-service programs overlook the crucial importance of relationships, instead focusing on behavior management. That’s why I spend so much of my time teaching providers and parents about social and emotional development. A basic grasp of neuroscience and social-emotional development can help us understand how to avoid asking too much, too soon of children. **It also helps us avoid inadvertently causing shame or embarrassment to children who can’t understand why they can’t behave or meet adult expectations, even though they want to. We must be especially mindful of this need in our populations of children exposed to ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and toxic stress.** Reward and punishment paradigms, in wide use today on these populations, are not advised.

When we ask too much of children too soon, we can inadvertently provoke self-criticism and shame. Kristin Neff, the world’s primary researcher on self-compassion, offers a solution: we can show children early on how to have compassion for themselves and accept their own vulnerability. In other words, when behaviors are a problem, we can help children have compassion for themselves and look towards adults for help.

When we are present with children, and compassionately aware of our own emotions, we preserve the most precious factor in a child’s process of developing self-regulation: human connection.

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<https://monadelahooke.com/challenging-behaviors-why-we-shouldnt-expect-kids-to-self-regulate-too-soon/>



HELPING YOUR TODDLER NAVIGATE PEER REJECTION AND CULTIVATE SOCIAL SKILLS

Guest Author: Dr. Sarah Bren

As a parent, it can be overwhelming, confusing, and maddening when you observe your young child being rejected. You may not know how to respond if your toddler pushes another child at the park, or if your child tells you about a friend who says he no longer wants to play with them. Change in a child’s preference of playmate is a normal part of childhood, and yet young kids don’t often have sophisticated language skills to express these changing desires. While this is a tricky situation for parents to navigate, they offer a unique opportunity for building your child’s resilience and fostering their assertiveness skills, perspective taking, and empathy.

What Should I Do When Another Toddler Rejects My Child?

Seeing your child be rejected or teased can certainly evoke strong feelings. When your child is rejected, you may find yourself jumping into a “protector” mode. While this makes sense given our biological drive to keep our children safe, we also want to teach our children that a) peer rejection happens; and b) they can handle it.

Instead of jumping into protective parent mode, first try taking a deep breath and grounding yourself. When you do, you’ll activate the thinking and logical parts of the brain and

(Continued on page 8)

THE MAMA OF THE WILD CHILD IS TRYING HARDER THAN YOU KNOW

Written by KARA SHOOK

To the mama with the wild child: I see you.

I was once the person who would say, "That kid wouldn't act like that if he was disciplined."

But oh, did God have a plan of teaching me a lesson I didn't know I needed to learn and making me eat those words.

I have the wild child.

The one who never stops. Who never listens to no. The one who standing in the corner, taking things away, being sent to his room, leaving places, and even spanking does not phase. The one who is LOUD. The one who will say, "I'm going to do it anyway" and proceed to do it when told not to do something.

I am the mother who feels guilty every single night. The mother who worries, "Was I too hard on him today?" EVERY. DAY. The mother who sees the judgmental looks from strangers, even friends and family. The mother who deals with

hurtful comments and watches my son be treated differently because he's a lot to handle. The mother who picks battles and let things go that I said I'd never let my child get away with, simply because if I didn't pick battles, he would always be in trouble.

I am the mother of a strong-willed wild child. And I pray that I'm able to guide him and teach him to use it for good. That he will stand against the crowd or even alone to do the right thing. That he won't care what people say or think of him for doing the right thing.

I see you mama with the wild child. You're doing a good job!

And if you're like I used to be, be kind to the mama of that wild child—she's trying harder than you could ever imagine.

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<https://herviewfromhome.com/motherhood-wild-child/>



Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association




FREE Virtual In-Service Training

9:00-11:00 am (CT)

Registration Required!

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NFAPA_In-Service_Oct_2024-Sept_2025

Date	Title & Trainer	
June 7, 2025	FASD 2.0 By Barb Clark, Director of Training for Families Rising	
Sept 13, 2025	De-escalation Training: Understanding the Arc of Escalating Behaviors By Jaclyn Kodosky, Families Rising	

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will be in a position to support your child. If your little one is having trouble expressing what they need, take an educated guess (“ouch, that may have hurt your feelings. Let’s go for a walk to regroup”).

Try validating your child’s feelings, using gentle touch if that is something they typically respond well to, and speaking in a calm, neutral tone to co-regulate with your child and help them begin to calm down.

Helping Your Child Build Empathy Towards Others

Next comes the “debrief.” After the heat of the moment has passed, talk to your child about what occurred earlier that day or even the day before. Try to help them create a narrative—what happened, then what happened next, then what happened after that? Focus on narration of what you’re hearing rather than interpretation. In doing so, you can begin to teach your child how conflicts unfold, while also finding ways to connect to your child’s emotional experience – “That sounds like it didn’t feel good for you.”

Then, activate and model curiosity – “I wonder what was going on for them, I wonder what was happening for this kid when that happened.” By asking questions about the other person’s experience, we help our kids grasp the idea of context and develop a sense of curiosity about another’s experience, which are two building blocks of empathy.

As hard as it may be, try to approach the situation without engaging in black-and-white thinking. This means modeling and teaching your child to view the situation in shades of gray. Ask your child to consider how the rejector or aggressor may have felt— maybe she used a bad word because she was upset and didn’t have other words to use, or maybe because she isn’t feeling so well today. You can support your child while being empathic to the other child’s experiences.

Through empathy, we help kids to avoid the trap of setting another person up as a villain, which has the potential to lead to self-shame when our kids inevitably exhibit similar behaviors in the future. As we said, rejection is a developmentally normal part of childhood. Our job as parents is to help our kids learn to express their needs in a kinder way,

What Is The Best Way to Respond When It’s My Child Being The Aggressor

If our child is the aggressor, we still want to encourage perspective taking. This means helping your child consider how their actions may have impacted the other person – “what do you think it was like for her when you ripped her artwork?”

Often, children are rejecting because they lack the skills to express their wants and needs in a more adaptive way. Try teaching your child alternative strategies, including using an “I Feel statement.” I feel mad when you cut me in line, and I’d like to take turns – and implement coping strategies to de-escalate. Practice these skills during calm moments so that your child is better able to access them in the heat of the moment. Some children may benefit from verbal prompts

or visual diagrams of the different tools to use. This is the beginning of the important process of teaching your child inhibition skills.

Most importantly, do your best to avoid shaming your child. Again, peer rejection is developmentally appropriate—especially for little ones. Send the message to your child that her choices don’t define her— yes, she was mean to her friend, but that doesn’t mean she is a bad kid. Look out for your knee jerk reaction to punish or judge; instead, speak with your child to understand what was going on for her before, during, and after the incident. The more your child feels heard, the more receptive she will be learning alternative strategies to express feelings.

How Can I Help My Young Child Learn to Set Boundaries?

Setting and maintaining boundaries are closely related to peer rejection. Young children often need support in learning how to set boundaries in appropriate ways. When children have the words to express their wants and needs, aggressive behavior often decreases. Further, when children are assertive, they are less likely to be the target of teasing or rejection.

Toddlerhood is the perfect time to begin to teach your little one how to set boundaries. Practice different scenarios—what would you say if someone asks you to share and you don’t want to, or if someone is standing too close to you? Encourage your child to practice assertiveness in the home— this means allowing them to say “no” sometimes. And model your own boundary-setting. We want to teach children that setting boundaries is okay.

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https://instituteofchildpsychology.com/helping-your-toddler-navigate-peer-rejection-and-cultivate-social-skills/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR6n-dfx99PKHr_v82JKUxD0bG1htig7N6KuhFC9MVWY1PkG6DC9As9JluiT4g_aem_J7wzmsXGtQJsCeBg50d9tA



75 AWESOME CALM DOWN STRATEGIES FOR KIDS (THAT THEY'LL WANT TO TRY!)

By Dr. John DeGarmo

75 Science-backed calm down strategies for kids that are easy, engaging, and will help your child develop strong emotional regulation skills. Read on and then grab your free printable of 75 calming techniques to have on hand when your child's anger or anxiety takes over.

When it comes to children's emotional development you're going to be hard-pressed to find another skill as important (and as predictive of future success) as emotional regulation.

Due to your child's immature nervous system and still under major construction, developing frontal cortex, it makes sense that they often lack the skills that help them to successfully manage their emotions and feelings (and if you're being honest, I bet you'd say you're still working on this particular ability too- even as an adult!).

One of the most helpful things you can do as a parent (and when it comes to how to raise an emotionally intelligent child) is to support your child in exploring different calming strategies for kids that help foster your child's emotional regulation.

You may have mistakenly assumed that these skills would appear naturally on their own, but it's only through a lot of trial and error, repetition and teaching, that your child will develop strong Emotional regulation skills and the ability to consistently seek out healthy coping and calming techniques when experiencing intense emotions.

What makes this list of calm down strategies for kids different?

You might be wondering what makes these calming strategies for kids different than other's you've tried. These techniques are proven effective and are research-backed because they:

- 1) Are grounded in the neuroscience of emotional regulation, or how your child's brain functions when processing stress and intense emotion
- 2) Include activities that utilize co-regulation, or a child's need to have close connected support from a caregiver in order to return to a physiologically regulated state
- 3) Focus on physical movements that provide calming and organizing sensory input to the brain and nervous system

75 calming strategies for kids that they'll love!

1. Breathe.

We have to start with this one because it's powerful. Breathing exercises for kids are the quickest and most efficient way to disengage your child's limb system and decrease stress bodies stress response.

2. Cuddle with a warm compress

3. Play/cuddle with a pet.

4. Write a letter.

Write a letter to someone you'd like to share your feelings with, or about a challenging topic or situation.

5. Breathe in a favorite scent.

Essential oils work amazingly for this! The brain's olfactory center overlaps with areas that control emotions, so scent has a major impact on our emotions. Here are some safe, kid-friendly options we love!

6. Count your heartbeats.

7. Get wrapped up tight in a blanket like a burrito.

8. Tell a grown-up what you need.

9. Draw/color what your feelings would look like.

10. Squeeze something

The reason 'squeeze balls', putty, squishes work is they send the brain calming proprioceptive sensory input (from compressing the joints). Try it yourself and you'll feel what I mean!

11. Do animal walks (bear, crab, frog jumps etc.).

12. 'Yell your anger' into a pillow/blanket/sleeve.

13. Watch an animal.

Animal watching is a great way to teach mindfulness with kids

14. Make a fort to hide in.

15. Cuddle up with a cozy blanket.

16. Do a handstand.

Inversion (or handing upside down) is a proven technique that quickly affects the autonomic nervous system, slowing down the body's stress response.

17. Try a short guided meditation for kids

18. Play with water.

19. Listen to music.

20. Jump.

21. Visualize a 'happy place'.

22. Stretch.

23. Do a downward-facing dog yoga pose (you can find more in this yoga routine for kids).

24. 5-4-3-2-1 Challenge

Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This helps pull us into our bodies senses (which has a grounding effect), and out of our overly-activated 'emotion center' of the brain.

25. Go outdoors.

26. Give yourself a hand massage.

27. Slow down your breathing with an expandable ball.

28. Squeeze a stuffed animal.

29. Identify your emotions

30. Get in touch with nature.

Just holding something from nature or watching nature on TV has been found to produce calming effects on the brain!

31. Do wall push-ups.

32. Do a sensory play activity.
33. Ask for a hug.
34. Drink a glass of water.
35. Push your palms together, hold, then release and repeat.
This is one of the quickest, easiest and most convenient ways to give the brain calming sensory input.
36. Put on noise-canceling headphones for quiet.
37. Turn off the lights.
38. Run/walk around the outside of the house a few times.
39. Get a back scratch.
40. Take a warm bath.
41. Read a book about emotions.
42. Make your own fidget.
43. Rock back and forth.
44. Do a 'brain dump' in a journal.
45. Rip up or crumple a piece of paper.
46. Name 5 favorite things.
Focusing on gratitude will help soothe and de-activate the emotion center of the brain.
47. Chew gum or a chewy.
48. Rock yourself like a baby.
49. Cover up with a weighted blanket.
50. Color or read on your stomach.
51. Go to the park.
52. Watch a bubble timer or bubble stick.
53. Find a cozy space to crawl into.
54. Do 15 squats.
55. Squeeze your fists as tight as you can.
56. Count backward from 50.
57. Remind yourself it's ok to be angry/upset/hurt etc.
58. No, seriously. Go outside!
59. Go for a bike ride.
60. Try a yoga video on Youtube.
61. Make a pillow trail and crawl over it.
62. Learn about why it's hard to control your emotions sometimes.
63. Close your eyes and tune out the world.
64. Give yourself a tight squeeze.
65. Sit with your feelings for a few minutes and allow yourself to experience them.
66. Call a friend.
67. Pray
68. Eat a crunchy snack.
69. Knit/crochet or create something with your hands.
70. Repeat positive affirmations.
71. Look at a magazine.
72. Use these yoga cards for strong girls.
73. Recite the alphabet backward.
Focusing on a specific cognitive task helps de-activate your brain's 'emotion center' (amygdala) and activate the 'thinking center' (frontal lobes).
74. Climb.
75. Remind yourself emotions are like waves, they come and

they go.

Important points to remember about calming strategies for kids

When it comes to emotional development in children there's no 'one size fits all' option.

Every child will differ with what their nervous system needs to down-regulate or slow down in order to regain emotional control. Their preferences will also change with different stages of development, seasons or ages.

A large part of raising an emotionally intelligent child is helping them to understand how to take care of their brain and body when experiencing emotional intensity and this list of calm down techniques for kids will get you off to a running start!

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IT BROKE MY HEART TO SEE MY SON SUFFER WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY—HERE IS HOW TO HELP

Written by parentingteensandtweens

Up until seventh grade, my son loved school. He got along well with other kids, played sports, and seemed happy.

We knew something was wrong the first week of junior high school. Six elementary buildings fed into his school and he barely recognized anyone in his classes. He seemed panicked each morning and sullen each night.

We tried to coach him through a few scenarios at home to help him manage the transition. We gave him some ideas on how to talk to other kids and encouraged him to sign up for a few after school activities.

But things went from bad to worse.

He started avoiding things he once loved, like baseball and scouts. He appeared panicked when we dropped him off at school events, even if he was with a friend. His grades slipped downwards, and he would not talk to his teachers, who reported that he was not participating in class.

There were a few physical symptoms as well. He complained of stomach aches at night and nausea in the morning. He wasn't sleeping great. Sometimes he appeared erratic or inconsolable.

By the second semester of 8th grade, we knew we were dealing with a major problem. That was when we discovered our son had social anxiety.

Social anxiety can be debilitating, especially in adolescents

While it's normal to feel nervous in some social situations, social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, is when everyday interactions cause significant anxiety, self-consciousness, and embarrassment because you fear being scrutinized or judged negatively by others.

For teens and tweens with developing brains, raging hormones, and changing bodies, social anxiety can develop quickly and disrupt their lives. In some extreme circumstances, the severe stress can affect relationships, daily routines, work, school, or other activities.

As an adult, it can be a bit easier to understand and recognize the signs of social anxiety. When it comes to your teen, it's important to help them deal and understand those feelings and emotions.

Social anxiety disorder can be a chronic mental health condition. When behavior turns from nervousness to avoidance with accompanying physical symptoms, it's time to seek help from a qualified medical professional or mental health therapist. There are a multitude of coping skills and medications that can help a person manage and improve their ability to interact with others.

Signs and symptoms of social anxiety disorder

According to the Mayo Clinic, the signs and symptoms of social anxiety disorder can include constant:

- Fear of situations in which you may be judged negatively
- Worry about embarrassing or humiliating yourself
- Intense fear of interacting or talking with strangers
- Fear that others will notice that you look anxious
- Fear of physical symptoms that may cause you embarrassment, such as blushing, sweating, trembling or having a shaky voice
- Avoidance of doing things or speaking to people out of fear of embarrassment
- Avoidance of situations where you might be the center of attention
- Anxiety in anticipation of a feared activity or event
- Intense fear or anxiety during social situations
- Analysis of your performance and identification of flaws in your interactions after a social situation
- The expectation of the worst possible consequences from a negative experience during a social situation

How to help your teen with social anxiety

If you cannot get professional help, there are ways you can help your teen cope with social anxiety issues.

Help your teen understand exactly what social anxiety means

Your teenager has probably heard that term before, but may not understand how it applies to their situation. Some teens feel that they are social or because they have a group of friends, they cannot have social anxiety. Others think they just aren't good enough.

It's important for teens to understand the symptoms they have and how they may be impacting their physical and

mental health. Discuss how their feelings and reactions may be outside "typical" range and negatively affecting their well-being. Talk about how there are ways to help these reactions and that they are the result of a disorder and not because they are weak or bad.

Talk to your teen about taking time to themselves when in social situations

We've all been there, right? At a gathering with a ton of people and then suddenly, that feeling of claustrophobia starts to sit in, or the room just suddenly feels very heavy and almost "out" of air. It's those moments that are triggering feelings of social anxiety. Give your teen those examples and see if they can relate.

If you can give them real-life examples, it may be easier for them to process and understand. The next point to make after giving those examples is to then let them know that it's perfectly fine to take some "alone" time, even at social gatherings. This can be as simple as going to the restroom alone or taking a short walk outside to get some fresh air to compose themselves. Anything that they can do that is safe, and that will get them some space to calm their emotions a bit is always a good idea in terms of anxiety.

Let your teen know that they aren't alone

Having social anxiety is quite common. People tend to feel this way when they're in a large group or in an unfamiliar setting surrounded by people they don't know. Sometimes, the feeling is faint and is easy to overcome, and other times it takes a bit more time and effort.

The one thing that you need to truly communicate for certain to your teen about social anxiety is that they aren't

NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines

- Fourth Tuesday of the month — for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- RSVP required — Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273 or Jessica at mailto:jessica@nfapa.org

Adoptive Mom Support Group in Lincoln

- Second Friday of the month, for adoptive moms.
- 7:00-9:00 pm
- RSVP required, Felicia, (402) 476-2273

alone or wrong in their feelings. Anxiety is a natural response that is genetically wired into our DNA. Focus on the end goal in helping them manage it.

Validate their feelings.

Don't downplay the feelings that your teen is having when it comes to social anxiety. If their feelings are strong about not wanting to go somewhere or do something, then you should discuss it to see if it makes sense for them to attend that specific event. It's also important to help them to discuss what-if scenarios and role play to help them manage their social anxiety leading up to an event.

Help them face their fears with boundaries and a safety net

While your teen's instinct will be to avoid social situations that cause discomfort, it is important to help them conquer their fears. The more they realize they can survive challenging situations, the more confidence they will gain.

That doesn't mean, however, forcing your teen to participate in things they don't want to do. Instead, find a few activities they enjoy, and then set time limits, so they know that they will not be stuck indefinitely in an uncomfortable situation.

For example, if they go to a school event, let them know you will pick them up at a certain time unless you hear from them that they want to stay longer. Let them have a new friend over at their house first so they can feel more comfortable. Have a code word they can text you at any time in the instance they can't control their emotions.

Structure and routine often wanes during the teenage years, but incorporating time limits and safety nets into social situations can give some control back to an anxious teen.

Find and help them use coping mechanisms

Helping your teen deal with social anxiety in adolescence can help minimize the impact they have on their lives as adults. Breathing exercises can help your child stay calm and centered.

There are many different strategies to help your teen deal with social anxiety. Breathing exercises can help your child stay calm and reduce stressful feelings. Simply going to the restroom, closing their eyes, and breathing to the count of ten may reduce the negative self-talk they are experiencing.

Other tactics include practicing mindfulness, incorporating positive affirmations into daily use, and focusing on building your teen's self-esteem.

Facing your fears

While your teen's instinct will be to avoid social situations that cause discomfort, it is important to not their fears win. The more they realize they can survive challenging situations, the more confidence they will gain.

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The goal is to encourage them to participate in life, but in a safe and non-threatening way.

Learning to live with social anxiety

Talk to them about the signs that they should be aware of for social anxiety and give them positive feedback and reinforcement about ways that they can combat it.

You may find that they start taking baby steps to combat those feelings of social anxiety, but every step they take forward is one step closer to overcoming it!

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“Family is not defined by our genes, it is built and maintained through love.”

-Amalia G.



A respected national voice for foster, kinship, and adoptive families through networking, education and advocacy.



Tammy Wells, Alma, NE
President, NFPA Board of Directors
April 2025

It is my privilege and honor to be addressing you as the newly elected NFPA President. I look forward to spending my time serving NFPA constituents, families, and sponsors in this capacity through networking, advocacy, and education.

Well-supported, well-trained foster families are better equipped to advocate for their needs and those of the children they serve. By empowering families, we can effect meaningful change at all levels of the system, from local communities to state and federal governments.

My role in the foster care realm has been as a birth, foster, kinship, and adoptive parent. My husband and I started our journey of fostering families when our two birth children were young, and they asked if we could share our home and love with other children that needed a safe place and someone to connect with. As our journey began, we decided to open our hearts and home to sibling strips of three or more children or single children diagnosed with special needs. After a journey of just under 30 years, we find ourselves continuing the journey and learning to network, advocate, and educate our own families and families throughout our state.

In 2016 after being a part of the NFPA Council of State Affiliates I applied for a position on the NFPA Board of Directors. In July of that year I attended my first meeting as a board member and have been active in the board ever since. During my time serving I have held chair positions on the finance, audit, and strategic planning membership committees. I have also been active on the conference, scholarship, governance, and bylaw committees. Most recently I was the NFPA vice president until my election of president in January of this year.

May your days be filled with life, love, laughter, and memories! *Tammy*

WHY SHOULD YOU BE A FOSTER PARENT? FOR THIS ONE SIMPLE REASON.

Written by Dr. John DeGarmo

“What you will do as a foster parent will truly be making a tremendous difference in the lives of children in need.”

Can I share something with you? Being a parent has been the second best thing I have ever done. The first, of course, was marrying my wife! To be sure, being a parent has made me a much better person, in so many ways.

Yet, the road to being a parent for me took a sad path in the beginning. My first child died of a disease known as Anencephaly, a condition where the brain, scalp, and skull never truly form.

When my wife gave birth to our child, she was in labor for 92 hours before our first daughter was born. When my wife gave birth to our child, the tiny infant died immediately upon reaching oxygen. The next several months saw my wife and I both suffer from overwhelming grief. We both reacted differently with the loss of our first child. Kelly grieved in a healthy fashion, while I did not. I remained in denial for quite some time, in fact for the next two years. I buried myself in my work, refusing to grieve or feel sadness. It was not healthy for either I or for our marriage.

Since that time, my wife has given birth to three healthy children, and we have adopted three more from foster care. Furthermore, we have been foster parents to over sixty children, as we have tried to help children in need. As a result of our first child dying, I have come to realize that the gift of children is a precious one, and that the responsibility of raising children is one that is so very important.

There have been those moments when I have questioned whether or not I was making a difference. There have been those times when I have grown frustrated with the system, as I have had to stand by and watch some of the children in my home go back to environments and situations which I knew that were not healthy or safe, for that matter. To be sure, I have also watched my wife's own doubts, and her desire to no longer foster, as her heart had been broken numerous times from the many children she had grown to love, only to see them return to homes where the children were once again placed in jeopardy. It is the same for so many foster parents who have shared their stories with me. I have heard from foster parents who lose sleep each night for weeks and months on end, trying to calm and soothe a baby born addicted to crack, heroin, or meth. I have heard from foster parents who have been yelled at on a daily basis from foster teens who are so emotionally upset by their own experiences that they take it out on their foster parents. I have heard from those who have been told one day they could adopt their foster babies, only to be told another

day that the baby would return instead to a biological family member the child had never met. The stories are countless, the stories are heartbreaking, and the stories are never ending. Surely, there is no earthly reason to be a foster parent. So, why do we do it? For many, like my wife, we are answering a call. The call to take care of children who are hurting, who are scared, who are in need.

As a foster parent myself, I want to remind you that being a foster parent will change the world, not just for the child, but for you as well. What you will do as a foster parent will truly be making a tremendous difference in the lives of children in need. You WILL change the life of a child. You WILL plant a seed in the life of a child in foster care that WILL grow, and WILL bloom. You may not see this transformation while the child is living in your home; this seed may not blossom until much later, but it will blossom if you plant it with love, water it with your tears, and nurture it with your time and compassion.

Sometimes, we may not be able to save a child from having a horrible and tragic experience before they come to live with us. Yet, we are given the chance, as foster parents, to save them from experiencing other future horrors, and taking them away from dangerous situations. Without a doubt, this is a joy itself.

America's foster care system is at a crisis level, as there are not enough foster parents to care for these children in need. It's time we change that. It's time you and I work together to bring hope, to bring healing, and to bring love to children in need. It will be the greatest gift you can give a child, and the greatest gift you can give yourself. Change the world one child at a time. You CAN make a difference. You CAN make the world a better place. Let's truly bring love to a child in need today.

*Dr. John DeGarmo is an international expert in parenting and foster care, and a TEDx Talk presenter. Dr. John and his wife have been foster parents and have had over 60 children come through their home. He is an international consultant to legal firms and foster care agencies, as well as an empowerment and transformational speaker and trainer on many topics about the foster care system. He is the author of several books, including *Fostering Love: One Foster Parent's Journey*, and writes for several publications. Dr. John has appeared on CNN HLN, Good Morning, America, ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and elsewhere. He and his wife have received many awards, including the Good Morning America Ultimate Hero Award. He can be contacted at drjohndegarmo@gmail.com, through his Facebook page, Dr. John DeGarmo, or at The Foster Care Institute.*

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<https://drjohndegarmo.medium.com/why-should-you-be-a-foster-parent-for-this-one-simple-reason-689fed9eff79>

BECOME A COMPREHENSIVE FOSTER CARE PROVIDER

A NEW OPPORTUNITY

Are you an experienced foster parent ready to provide specialized care and support to youth with higher needs? The **Comprehensive Foster Care (CFC) Program** offers training, financial support, and 24/7 assistance to help you make a lasting impact.

CFC is a specialized foster care program designed to stabilize and support youth up to 19 years old with unique and complex needs.

WHY BECOME A CFC PROVIDER?

- **Peer Community:** Be part of a CFC Provider community, for mentorship and support.
- **Respite Care:** Monthly respite opportunities to support your well-being.
- **Specialized Training**
- **Financial Support:** Earn a base annual stipend of \$41,415 plus the youth's daily NCR rate when a youth is placed in the home. NCR rates range between \$26.10 – \$108.77 per day.

AS A CFC PROVIDER YOU WILL:

- Provide structured, trauma-informed care in a stable home environment.
- Work closely with a dedicated CFC Specialist.

WHO CAN APPLY?

- Licensed foster parents in Nebraska.
- At least one caregiver must be available full time or work a reduced schedule (20 hours or less per week).
- Willing to accept one youth at a time without conditions.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP:

For additional questions, send us an email or scan the QR code.

To Apply: Email DHHS.ComprehensiveFC@nebraska.gov with your contact information and statement of interest. The team will reach out to you for next steps.



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JOIN NFAPAyour support will enable NFAPA to continue supporting foster parents state-wide!

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

Thank you for your support!

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

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

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

Name(s): _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ County: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

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

I am with _____ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

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

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

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