

# Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

September / October 2022

N F A N P A

## 12 THINGS TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT NAVIGATING CLIQUES AT SCHOOL

By Mandy Velez

Kids can be mean, often downright cruel, and may not even realize it. Who here has ever felt victimized by a school bully? We sure have. Humans are built to *find groups and fit in*, so it makes sense that these behaviors manifest themselves on the playground or middle school lunch rooms without other kids understanding how they may hurt the feelings of a child who is not part of that group, but wants to be. Not to mention, *distance learning may have already taken a toll* on kids' social-emotional well-being.

But just because it's human nature doesn't mean your child is wrong to feel how he feels, or that nothing can be done. Parents can help and we have a few ideas how — from pep talks, to sharing personal experience, to classic movies (cough cough *Means Girls* in age-appropriate) and helping get them the resources they need to forge new relationships.

**Know that what your child is feeling is normal.**

It's human nature for people to want to feel accepted and part of a group, so it's *natural for kids* to take it hard if they don't feel part of the group of popular kids, or another group at school. The first step to helping them navigate these feelings is to affirm that it does hurt to not be accepted, and that they're not alone in these feelings.

**Understand that it's important to validate their experience.**

Equally as important in helping kids handle the hurtful feelings that come from clique rejection is to validate their sadness. Don't tell them that there are bigger things to worry about or that someone else has it worse. What they're feeling is what they're feeling and it's OK. What matters is how to fix this problem right now.

**Let them know almost everyone goes through an uncool phase in school.**

Maybe you were cool, but chances are, we all were uncool at some point in our adolescent lives. Sharing that experience with your children can help them see that you are still living a happy life despite also experiencing the clique hardship. Because *as Kids Health* says, it shows "cliques have been around for a long time.

**Talk about their interests and help them**

**sign up for activities outside of school.**

Even adults who are around the same coworkers or family members long enough will have relationship problems come up. The same goes for kids who may have been around the same group of peers for a few years if they're already in middle school. Encouraging kids to sign up for an activity will facilitate opportunities for them to make stronger connections with other kids, or, if it's outside of their school, will enable



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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](mailto: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/SeptOct2022> 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. What movie was mentioned that deals with bullying?
2. True or False. Sometimes kids are so worried about fitting in, they forget that there might be lots of other kids who want the same thing and are also struggling.
3. Fill in the Blanks. Navigating the school system with a child who has learning challenges, a history of exposure to trauma, or prenatal exposures can be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ to the bone.
4. True or False. Parents raising children exposed to trauma understand that the difference between unwilling and unable is not enormous.
5. Fill in the Blank. \_\_\_\_\_ only becomes generational if it goes unresolved!
6. The signs of dealing with unprocessed trauma are different for everyone. What are some of the signs to look for that could indicate that generational trauma is affecting your kids?
7. What percentage of foster children have significant enough exposure to trauma that the child's ability to learn is impacted.
8. True or False. When a child's brain regularly functions in self-protection or survival mode, it can also focus on learning.
9. True or False. When a child's brain regularly functions in self-protection or survival mode, it can also focus on learning.
10. True or False. Early experiences with failure will help them make tough decisions as they grow older and ultimately guide their successes.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

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them to *diversify their friend groups*, and see that the cliques in school aren't the only ways to have friends.

### **Like the Mathletes (just kidding! But they can if they want to.).**

Mathletes, the fake competitive math club from the movie *Mean Girls*, was said to be “social suicide” in the film, but the point remains: Leaning into interests can be a good thing. After all, Cady, the main character in the movie, feels much more fulfilled helping the club win than being “fake” trying to fit in with the popular girls.

### **Help kids pinpoint their good friends and help them nurture those relationships.**

Human beings love to default to absolutes when they're stuck in an emotional cycle, kids especially. “Everything sucks.” “Nobody likes me.” “I have no friends.” Try to help them ditch this language and identify whether or not it's actually true. Then they discover it's not — because more than likely, every kid has at least one solid friend — and then as a parent, pay attention, and check in to see if there's a way to help the kid connect more with that friend.

### **Kids need to know they are awesome for being who they are — and it's not as cool to be the same as everyone else.**

Telling your kid that she's amazing until you are blue in the face won't do too much if she's super down about it. After all, it's not about what you think, it's about what everyone else does. But highlighting the fact that it's good to be different, and not like everyone else, can help kids re-frame how they think about themselves.

### **Encourage them to try to keep an open mind in building friendships with kids who aren't in a clique either.**

Sometimes kids are so worried about fitting in, they forget that there might be lots of other kids who want the same thing and are also struggling. Or, kids will overlook other kids because they're different than them. Encourage your child to have an open mind when thinking about people to talk to or get to know in school.

### **Help them to see that the things they're interested in are cool and other people agree, too.**

To that effect, have your kids try to name the things that they are interested in and help them identify others who may also take an interest in it. Maybe it's someone at school who also likes that game, or listens to that band. Or, maybe it's a group outside of school. It could be a place to take them to feel like they are with like-minded people.

### **Help them understand if what they're experiencing is bullying — and call it out.**

Cliques are a subtle form of bullying, usually subconscious. But exclusion is outright bullying. Help your child identify what is happening, and if it's exclusion, help him see that, name it, and explain why it's wrong and why it happens. When you do that, he can see the behavior of others is not a reflection of who he is, but a reflection of the bully.

### **Have them watch ‘Means Girls’ — and ensure that it's better to be nice than hit by a bus!**

If your child is middle or high school age, it might be worthwhile to show her the movie *Mean Girls*. Aside from being absolutely hilarious, it also shows that cliques hurt people overall in the long run. There are also other age-appropriate materials to have kids watch or read to feel like they can relate to those experiences, including the book *Blubber* by Judy Blume and others *as pointed out by Kids Health*.

### **If it comes down to it, set the child up with a good therapist so he can work through his emotions. It's hard out there!**

Cliques and the emotions that kids experience because of them aren't just part of life. They can have serious mental health repercussions, like anxiety and depression, and it doesn't make sense to make a child suffer just because it is so common. Find a therapist that can help him work through his feelings and learn how to cope with them when they come up.

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[https://cafemom.com/parenting/things-to-teach-kids-about-navigating-cliques-at-school?pubdate=1660989600000&utm\\_medium=sm&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_content=business\\_fbpage&utm\\_term=new&fbclid=IwAR2gC6gQi1E0slmioF7XEN8\\_DlbfncjS2aKsa-91PIC1BAf6fIIXbENjY](https://cafemom.com/parenting/things-to-teach-kids-about-navigating-cliques-at-school?pubdate=1660989600000&utm_medium=sm&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=business_fbpage&utm_term=new&fbclid=IwAR2gC6gQi1E0slmioF7XEN8_DlbfncjS2aKsa-91PIC1BAf6fIIXbENjY)

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## **HELP MY CHILD HATES SCHOOL**

### *Creating a Family Blog*

There is almost nothing more challenging about parenting during the school-age years than a child who hates school. When the school is not a good fit for your child, it colors almost everything about daily life together. Navigating the school system with a child who has learning challenges, a history of exposure to trauma, or prenatal exposures can be overwhelming, defeating, and exhausting to the bone. When you have a child who hates school, you feel the weight of their future world is squarely on your shoulders. Your worries keep you up at night, and trust us when we say that you are not alone in your anxiety!

## A NOTE FROM DHHS:

The Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility (NCR) Assessment Tool was developed through the Foster Care Rate Reimbursement Committee. The NCR determines what level of care the foster parent is providing in order to meet the needs of the child placed with them.

The NCR was first implemented in July 2014 with three levels of care, Essential, Enhanced and Intensive. There are two more levels of care that will be implemented on October 1, 2022, Intensive Plus, and Specialized. Not all contracted Child Placing Agencies will be supporting foster parents at Intensive Plus and Specialized.

A Request for Quotes (RFQ) was released on July 28, 2022. Child Placing Agencies who are interested and able to meet the requirements outlined in the RFQ will submit a response to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) providing this information. Agencies that submit a response and meet all requirements are able to support foster homes that provide care at the Intensive Plus and Specialized levels.

All Child Placing Agencies that contract with the Division of Children and Family Services will provide support for the Essential, Enhanced, and Intensive Levels. Only those agencies that respond to the RFQ will have foster homes that are providing Intensive Plus, and Specialized levels of care. Not all foster homes within that Child Placing Agency will be providing care at the Intensive Plus and Specialized Levels.



## Do a Brain Dump in Your Journal

Do these spiraling worries sound familiar? What do you do when the fear and worry about your child's fear, anxiety, and utter distaste for school take over your brain? One helpful tool for managing this level of stress and anxiety in our parenting hearts is to journal.

Write it all out – brainstorm fashion, and don't censor yourself.

Then put it away until you are in a better mental space and re-read what you wrote. Were your fears realistic? Take them one by one and journal some answers to the questions you were spewing. Apply truth to those which were lies or fear-based exaggerations.

For example, "Yes, my child will launch successfully into adulthood – he might not go to college, but he will find the path that is right for him. We will support him as he learns and grows into that niche."

Identify in your journal which of your spiraling worries are unrealistic and respond with a more realistic, "light of day" thought.

For example, it's unrealistic to assume that your child will be living in your basement forever, eating your food every day for the rest of your life or his. He's only eight and just had a rough third-grade week in 3rd grade.

Instead, tell yourself that if someday your child is unable to live independently – for whatever reason – you will teach him the life skills he needs to shop for his own food and make his meals. But right now, he's only in 3rd grade, and sometimes third-graders regress. Sometimes, we all regress!

## The Legacy of Trauma is an Invisible Disability

Some families face a range of learning differences or disabilities. Other families are dealing with behavioral challenges. Frankly, when you have a child who struggles academically, it's rarely implied that if you just tried harder or parented differently, your child's academic challenges would

## Middle of the Night Worries

How will I help my child get the best education possible?

What exactly is the best education for this child?

Will my child ever make friends and learn social skills?

Would medication be the magic pill that will make all these problems disappear?

Is it just me, or does this teacher seem not to like my kid?

Does this mean I need to change the classroom assignment?

What should I do about standardized testing? Even if this kid can sit for the testing period, I'm pretty sure my child will not pass any of them!

Will my child get into college? Is college even the best option for my child? Should I start researching trade schools?

Is my child ever going to launch successfully to adulthood?

Will she be living in my basement and eating out of my fridge for the rest of her life?

What is a realistic expectation for this child's ability to support himself?

And speaking of being realistic — am I being unrealistic about what I expect the school to do to support my child?

Will my child be beaten down by the system that is supposed to prepare him for his future? Will I make it through his school experience?



disappear. Parents who are managing behavioral issues are not quite that lucky.

Many parents of a child who has experienced abuse, neglect, trauma, or prenatal exposure will face judgment, resistance, and lack of compassion from the child's educational team. Teachers and educational intervention specialists might assume your child is unwilling to fit into the system or unwilling to behave appropriately. The fact is that your child might be unable to conform to the expectations of the classroom.

Parents raising children exposed to trauma understand that the difference between unwilling and unable is enormous. However, a teacher might not know that yet and instead assume that your parenting is lacking or too soft. The legacy of our children's trauma becomes an invisible disability that is disheartening for us and demoralizing for our kids.



## Prioritize Your Family Relationship Over School Success

Most five-year-olds love everything about school. They love their teachers, backpacks, lunch boxes, and friends. For many kids, this changes as they experience increasing frustration, failure, or challenges in the classroom.

After all, a child can only face so much failure before they start feeling stupid and incapable. You can see her becoming resistant to school and learning. He turns a 15-minute homework assignment into a 2-hour battle. He drags his feet getting ready for school, starting the day with so much dysregulation and making everyone late. It's enough to break your heart. Truthfully, it's enough to break your spirit – you know they are feeling the same way.

When you face these levels of brokenness and stress around

your child's school experience, it's time to bottom-line it for yourselves. Family relationships come first. Attachment and connection are the priority, and helping your child feel safe with you and in your home is at the top of your list.

## How Do You Do That?

Practically speaking, the first thing you can do to implement this priority of Family First is to contact the school and let them know you are struggling. Outline your game plan for them. Here are a couple of suggestions for what to consider in your game plan:

We won't be doing homework for the rest of this marking period.

When he gets home from school, we are going to (take a nap, ride bikes, play with Legos, whatever refuels you both).

Please don't mark his behavior on any charts. You can send me an email if we should address a specific behavior. Otherwise, don't include him in the clip chart system.

Can we arrange some additional support for math class for the rest of this marking period? We won't be doing math homework anymore. It's far too stressful for us both.

Find out what you both need to reduce your child's anxiety about school and do it! Make home a safe space by implementing your plans in a predictable, consistent routine. Spend your time together playing games, listening to his favorite music, or baking. Focus on connection with the precious spirit that his perceived classroom failures trampled.

## Be Willing to Re-Evaluate Your School Options

Experienced parents who bear battle scars from fighting the school systems for their kids will tell you that you have many options for a healthy school experience.

One suggestion is to evaluate yearly what the options are where you live. What do the various schools around you offer that will benefit your child? What would be a "red flag" in the public school but maybe manageable in the charter school down the road? How can you cobble together the best option this year for this child? Sometimes, you will have to re-evaluate mid-year, and that is okay. Release yourself from the expectation that your child must finish the year where he started.

The options for schooling have increased dramatically in recent years, and online instruction is another valid consideration. There are also great resources for homeschooling – you don't have to be a certified teacher to supervise your child's education adequately! Check your state regulations to get a complete sense of requirements and resources.

## Championing Your Child Builds Life Skills

School challenges can be all-encompassing and threaten to take over our lives. However, we can shore up our child's life skills when we work with her to identify the issues and plan to tackle them together. We will send our kids affirming messages of our family values, her inherent preciousness, and

value in the family when we come alongside her to do so. What more attaching and connecting practice can you offer your child than telling her you are with her in this and that you will always have her best interest in mind as you parent her?!

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<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/adoption-blog/help-my-child-hates-school/>



## HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND DEAL WITH GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

by Joanna Eng

If our parents, grandparents, or even earlier generations had traumatic experiences that they never healed from, the resulting pain and dysfunction can be passed down to us—and even affect our parenting skills.

How do we break the cycle and stop more trauma from being passed down to our kids?

It may be too late to prevent horrible events and behaviors of the past, but that doesn't mean it's too late to heal. Remember this: Trauma only becomes generational if it goes unresolved! Caring for ourselves and processing our own trauma helps us take better care of our kids, and helps prevent the cycle from continuing.

### What is generational trauma?

Negative emotional baggage that is passed down from one

generation to the next, stemming from unhealed trauma in the past.

### Possible sources of generational trauma

You may have heard of generational trauma stemming from large-scale, long term traumatic experiences such as living through slavery in the United States, or enduring the Holocaust during World War II. But this type of inherited trauma can be rooted in other types of extreme, prolonged stress, including:

- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Natural disaster, epidemic, pandemic, violent events
- Loss of loved one(s)
- Persistent racism, oppression, or discrimination
- Neglect or abandonment
- Injury, illness, disability, untreated mental illness
- Being around substance abuse or domestic violence
- Poverty and food insecurity

### How it's passed down

Studies have shown that traumatic events can cause a chemical change in a person's DNA, which is then passed down to their offspring (and future generations). These genes can be expressed in new ways, potentially making future generations more prone to developing conditions such as PTSD, obesity, an elevated stress response, or any number of other physical and mental health issues.

Furthermore, exposure to trauma can impact the way we relate to and connect with others. It can spark substance misuse disorders, clinical anxiety, depression, and a host of other factors that deeply affect our parenting. As a result, unresolved trauma in one generation can cause them to behave in ways that unintentionally further traumatize their children or grandchildren.

Here's an example of how unhealed trauma in one generation can show up in future generations.

#### 1st Generation (Grandparents)

*War, PTSD, poverty, alcoholism, domestic violence*



#### 2nd Generation (Parents)

*Physical and emotional abuse, repressed anger, untreated mental illness, alcoholism*



#### 3rd Generation (Children)

*Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviors*

### How it could show up in your parenting

The trauma we and our families have endured aren't always present in obvious ways, but can show up in our daily mindset and parenting habits. Understanding that trauma is behind some of these behaviors can help us recognize them for what they are as they happen, and help us slowly work toward

healing so that these habits aren't perpetuated.

- Constant fear or guilt of acting like your own parents did
- Being overly protective or controlling of your kids
- Overcompensating by giving kids everything they want
- Overreacting to small mistakes
- Shutting down or blowing up when kids are loud, aggressive,

etc.

- Trying to push away kids' negative emotions
- Being obsessed with academic success
- Not trusting others to care for your kids

### How it could show up in kids

The signs of dealing with unprocessed trauma are different for everyone, but these are some of the signs to look for that could indicate that generational trauma is affecting your kids.

- Irritability and other signs of anxiety and/or depression
- Disordered eating
- Trouble regulating emotions
- Self-harm
- Substance abuse
- Nightmares or insomnia
- Behavioral issues at school
- Lack of academic motivation
- Distrust of doctors, authority figures, etc.
- Fear of asking for help

### How to avoid passing it on

Working through the trauma as you experience it—whether you're the first generation or the fifth—is the best way to stop the cycle and avoid passing it on to your own children. Here are some steps to start with:

Talk to kids in age-appropriate ways about past family trauma, instead of avoiding the topic.

Work through your trauma by speaking about it with therapists, friends, and/or support groups.

Create an open dialogue about mental health in your family, including how mental health services have helped you (if applicable).

Recognize harmful patterns in your own parenting, and find solutions with your partner/co-parent, family/friends, or therapist.

Seek out family therapy—there are free and low cost therapy options if cost is a barrier to getting the care you need.

Engage in meaningful projects and traditions with your kids that they'd be proud to pass on one day.

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<https://parents-together.org/how-to-recognize-and-deal-with-generational-trauma/?fbclid=IwAR1dn7S7jyXIVui1nKuzJhPCURogp08iYdEiXf5eYSH8i7HfZLzftt8X1-E>



## ADVOCATING FOR YOUR FOSTER OR KINSHIP CHILD AT SCHOOL

If you don't have experience with the jargon of educational supports, IEP's and 504's prior yet, advocating for your foster or kinship child in school can feel intimidating. It might sound like a whole new language at first. However, learning how to advocate for your foster or kinship child in school is an extension of the care you've been offering this child already.

### Why Do I Need to Advocate for My Foster or Kinship Child In School?

If you are fostering, you undoubtedly learned in your training classes that trauma impacts a child's developing brain. For those who are offering kinship care outside of the foster care system, you might not have had the benefit of those courses. The good news is that it's not too late to learn! CreatingaFamily.org has fantastic resources to help you understand the effects of early childhood trauma, as well as practical tools to parent children from difficult beginnings.

### Trauma Impacts Learning

Some studies estimate that as many as 80% of foster children have significant enough exposure to trauma that the child's ability to learn is impacted. The many losses in this child's life can also negatively impact the child's brain growth. When we think that the growing brain develops "from the inside out," we must remember that a child's social and emotional skills follow that pattern. When a child's brain regularly functions in self-protection or survival mode, it cannot also focus on learning.

This starting point will help prepare you for behaviors that seem younger than your foster or kinship child's chronological age. Maybe you've already observed "acting out" misbehaviors or difficulty with self-regulation. You may also notice your child lagging in the emotional or social milestones necessary for the classroom.

### You Can Be Your Child's Voice

With this information under your belt, advocating for your foster or kinship child in school equips you to be his voice and represent him well on the educational team. Your role as his



advocate will help you stay attuned to his needs and track his progress. You will also have the opportunity to educate the educators on this child's ability to find success in school.

## What Does My Foster or Kinship Child Need?

### First, Safety

The first thing your foster or kinship child needs is to feel safe in your home and your ability to care well for her. When you learn what makes her feel safe, share that with her education team. They can use that information in their classroom. A developing brain that feels safe is much more able to learn! Advocating for your foster or kinship child in school expands the felt-safety that you've created at home into her school environment. It's a practical way to set her – and her teachers – up for success.

### Second, You: Prepared

If your foster or kinship child comes to you with supports or services already in place, familiarize yourself with the information in his files. Request the file from your child's caseworker – or his former school. Review the documentation of his needs and educational plan. If your home means a new school setting for your foster or kinship child, your informed advocacy will help him settle more quickly. You will also be helping his new team meet his needs as documented. From this point of preparedness, you and the teachers can also change the interventions to support his learning better.

## How Do I Advocate for My Foster/Kinship Child in School?

### 1. Be the Team Leader

*Clear, Frequent Communication.*

Advocating for your foster or kinship child in school will require clear, regular communication between all of you. You can establish your role with the team by opening clear communication channels. That could look like an introductory email or a phone call. Some parents prefer to do it in person, so they arrange a tour of the school and an introduction to the team before school starts. At the start of your relationship with the new team, you will likely need more frequent contact. Issues like homework, behaviors in the classroom, family visitations, and things that directly impact the child's school day will need to be tweaked out as you get to know what works for this child.

*Keep a Paper Trail.*

Many experienced foster parents stress the need to communicate primarily by email to establish a "paper trail." Sadly, sometimes accountability and documentation become necessary. The documentation will come in handy should you need to change his services, request further evaluations, or brainstorm additional supports.

Remember: if the school is unable or unwilling to provide the support your child needs, you can inquire (again, do it in writing) about alternative resources to meet the needs you are observing. Keep your caseworker in the loop no matter what! *You are Your Foster/Kinship Child's Person.*

Remember that many schools don't have frequent experience with foster or kinship families. They might need you to walk them through the ways you want to be involved. Conversations that establish you as the child's point person should include the foster care caseworkers or CASA advocates if your child has one. Kinship caregivers who are not under the umbrella of the foster system should have legal documentation of guardianship in place.

### 2. Be Involved

Your foster or kinship child will benefit from the "whole" school experience, including extra-curricular activities and community-building events. Sign her up for soccer. Go to the school's Fall Fest. Volunteer in the classroom. If you have time before the school year starts, make play dates with other kids who attend the same school. It will be comforting to have familiar faces on her first day.

Yes, this will mean some extra time investments for you and your family. However, it's vital to a well-rounded educational experience. It also goes a long way to building your foster/kinship child's social and emotional skills in a fun, non-threatening setting. The added benefit is that many of these events offer your whole family some time to play together!



### 3. Be Open

You should be able to expect your foster or kinship child's educational team to be willing to learn from you about what works well for the child. However, it will be beneficial for your child if you also are ready to learn from the educators. This is especially true if this is your first go-round in the world of IEPs, 504s, and support services.

When presented with suggestions for curriculum modifications, take time to read up on their recommendations. Talk with the team about how they plan to implement the changes – ask for examples to help you understand. If they ask you to consider evaluations for possible learning challenges, request reputable resources to educate yourself for the follow-up conversation. Brainstorm with his teachers for classroom management alternatives and embrace the information shared.

### Build A Feeling of Safety At Home And In School

It might be challenging to know what support your foster or kinship child needs if he comes to you without an educational plan. It can also be challenging to plan educational



interventions when tense relationships exist between you and the child's birth family. If welcoming this child happens on very short notice, you might also feel like you are playing catch up.

Give yourself grace – it's an excellent example to the kids about handling challenging circumstances. Remember that you can only do your best when you face these obstacles. Familiarize yourself with the school district's Special Education structure. Read up on the impacts of trauma on learning. Call the school the child will attend and ask about the enrollment process. And remember to ask for his educational files when or if you get contacted for placement plans.

When you commit to these 3 Be's to support this foster or kinship child in school, you increase felt safety and set your foster or kinship child up to succeed in your home and school.

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raise awareness of these links without sacrificing your child's right to own and guard his story.

### **Raising Awareness While Guarding Privacy**

We've compiled a few ideas to help you increase a teacher's awareness of your child's life experiences and the impacts of those experiences – trauma history included. These ideas can still guard and protect the details of your child's story for him. Many of these ideas come from our podcast with Heather Forbes, LCSW, in our Back-to-School Resources campaign. Our online community also weighed in with experiences and what worked for them while navigating this line.

### **Start with Your Heart**

In the past, we've recommended writing a letter to your child's teacher. We think this is an excellent introduction to you and your family. When writing a letter or email, if you can get an address before school starts, consider what you want your child's teacher to know about your child:

What are your goals for your child this year?

How do you see yourself partnering with the teacher or support team to set them up for the best experience with your child?

What has worked – and not worked – in the classroom previously?

If you can meet with your child's team in person, remember that your words and body language will also convey your heart for your child. Even if it feels vulnerable, use these conversations to invite the teacher to see your child's preciousness and more than just the diagnoses on their IEP or notes in a file.

### **Lead with Your Child's Strengths**

## **WHAT DO YOU SHARE AT SCHOOL ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S STORY?**

### *Creating a Family Blog*

Your child spends several hours a day with his teachers, and you want to set his whole team up for success in the classroom as early as you can, right? One of the most common questions that foster, kinship, and adoptive parents ask in our online community is how much to share about their kids' stories to support the child's success in the classroom. It's a dilemma because adoptees frequently tell us that a child's story should be guarded and held carefully until the child has agency to tell or not to tell. Where is the line, and what do you share about your child's story at school?

### **No Easy Answers, Especially with the School**

Unsurprisingly, no single answer to this question suits every foster, kinship, or adoptive family. We know that doesn't make this conversation more straightforward.

Your priority at the start of a new school year is to get your children's teachers on your child's team. You want to invite them to partner with you to support your child and enhance learning. To fully understand your child's struggles with behavior or classroom experiences, it's also critical that your child's teacher also understand the roots of those behaviors and challenges. We know schools are becoming more trauma-informed. However, your school's leadership or classroom team might not yet understand the links between trauma, felt safety, and challenging behavior. Consider that your goal is to

When engaging your child's teacher in introductory conversations, start with your student's strengths. Is your child exceptionally nurturing? Fun-loving? Thoughtful? Analytical? Creative? Receptive to structure and routine?

Remember, this child will spend 7-8 hours a day with her teacher – brag on the great stuff that your child will add to their lives, too. Tell the teacher about those things and how much you love what your child brings to your life. Leading with your child's strengths gives the teacher insight into how you view your child. You are modeling with your language how you view challenges and what you've discovered about how your child gives and receives love and establishes felt safety.

For example, try something like this:

Janie is such a loving and affectionate child. Her happiest days are when our family is all home, spending time together. She loves to make us laugh. I think you will find that her exuberant spirit will be helpful to create a sense of family in the classroom once she feels safe with you.

### Keep it High Level with the Teacher

You can help your child's teachers be "trauma-informed" without going into the nitty-gritty of specific traumatic experiences your child has endured. Think about what the teacher needs to know to help your child succeed in the classroom. Heather Forbes used the analogy of a broken arm, and the accommodations classroom teachers make for that experience.

We've fleshed it out for you to consider when working with your child's teachers.

When a child has a broken arm, you work with the student, parents, and doctors' recommendations to adjust classroom expectations. If the fractured arm is his dominant hand, he might need someone to write for him. He wears a cast to protect the break while it heals. He gets breaks to rest his arm from the weight of the cast and the rub of the sling.

My student has a broken heart from many traumatic experiences before joining our family. He will need a warning and settle-in time to transition between activities, especially



when finishing something that was a lot of fun. She might also need time to regroup and regulate after recess or gym class. We find that ten minutes with a cold drink and a fidget toy help her regulate well. We also would like her to keep a snack and water bottle handy, as she gets dysregulated if she feels it is unavailable. These three things are big keys to helping her heart continue to heal, and we do them at home with successful outcomes daily.

### It's "Can't," Not "Won't," When It Comes to Behavior

As a parent of a child exposed to trauma, abuse, or neglect, you know there is a difference between misbehaving and acting out of a history of traumatic experiences. You understand – or are coming to understand – that trauma changes a child's developing brain and impacts how they learn. How can you help your child's support team and classroom teacher increase their understanding of these differences?

### Use Trauma-Informed Language With the School

Supplying language and resources to your child's teachers will help them support your child and increase their awareness of his needs without hearing the whole dark story that created those needs. Train yourself to use phrases like "high sensitivity to stress" or regulation, co-regulation, and dysregulation. You can then direct conversations toward the best mindset you know will support your child. Remember, we love the Dr. Ross Green quote, "Kids do well if they can."

Choose the language that views your child's trauma responses or challenging behaviors through a lens of regulation, stress sensitivity, or trauma triggers. This viewpoint will help you express your child's desire to do well with the right tools. Help your child's teachers understand your child's typical responses to adversity and why. You can invite the teacher to try the tools you've found successful by speaking of what dysregulates or stresses your child in the classroom. However, follow up with the significant progress he has made in utilizing those tools.

### Offer Trauma-Informed Resources to the School

Speaking of resources, share with the team what you are learning and from whom you are learning it. Keep the resources concise and targeted to the classroom management and the brain science of trauma related to the learning experience. Most teachers love well-informed parents and will gladly accept your evidence-based research. However, be respectful of their time and remember that the start of the school year is overwhelming for them too.

Here are a few recommendations from our research and families in our online community for quick, easy-to-digest tools for teachers:

Adverse Childhood Experiences, a website by the CDC

Aces Too High, a website dedicated to the most recent news and information about ACE scores

How Trauma is Changing Children's Brains – an article by NEA News

Why All Schools Should Be Trauma-Informed – a TEDTalk



# NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

## LOOKING FOR SUPPORT AND CEU'S?

**LIVE VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUP:** Available for all foster/adoptive & kinship parents on the First Tuesday at 6:30 pm (MT).

Contact : Jolie Camden: 308-672-3658 for the Zoom link  
Or: NFAPA Office : 402-476-2273

## LOOKING FOR SUPPORT ?

**FACES: ONLINE FOSTER PARENT KINSHIP SUPPORT GROUP CHAT:**  
Meets on Facebook Tuesday nights at 9:00 pm (CT) .

Available for all foster/adoptive & kinship parents.  
— No CEU'S or training.

Contact : Robbi Blume: 402-853-1091  
to add to group-must have Facebook account.  
Or: NFAPA Office : 402-476-2273

**PARENTING ACROSS COLOR LINES:** Available for all multi-racial families on the Fourth Monday at 6:30 pm (CT) in Lincoln.

Contact : Felicia Nelsen: 402-476-2273 to register to attend.





about ACEs in the classroom

What Teachers Should Know About Adoption – a downloadable pdf from The National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG)

Protective Factors that Help Your Child Overcome High ACEs – an article by CreatingaFamily.org

### Model the Priority of Relationships

As you've come to understand the healing process for your child, you've become equipped to prioritize connection and attachment with your child. Lay the path forward with your child's teacher by modeling that as you connect with them. Prioritize kindness and compassion in how you relate to them – and expect the same in their dealings with you and your child. In the early days of building this relationship, ask what you can do to support them throughout the year. This reciprocation of expertise and support is a crucial building block in any relationship – even more so when your child's success is at stake.

Build relationships with the staff and teachers by sharing resources you discover. But be sure to also show your openness to their insights and tools they have used in other situations or with other students. You will increase your trustworthiness and build credibility by adopting a collaborative approach.

### Learning What to Share About Your Child Is Ongoing

With the start of a new school year and considering what to tell the teacher about your child's story, it's easy to be overwhelmed by your child's experiences and the risks of struggle in the classroom. However, if you reflect on your precious child and what he has accomplished thus far, it is easier to think about partnering with another teacher this coming year to help your child thrive. Your expectations for

your child's classroom experience this year may be different than last year's, but as you learn and grow, so does your child. Inviting the teachers into your journey of who your child is can be rewarding and stretch you in many positive ways.

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<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/what-do-you-share-at-school-about-your-childs-story/>

## SHOULD I LET MY KIDS FAIL? 5 TIPS TO HELP KIDS FACE FAILURE

By Amy McCreedy

*Can I pour that juice for you?*

*Are you sure that's the right answer?*

*Did you remember to put your homework in your backpack?*

We ask our kids lots of questions each day in hopes of avoiding minor messes, stained shirts, and undesirable consequences for them. But mostly, we want to build their confidence.

**And if we want to build their confidence, a logical follow-up question would be:** *Should I let my kids fail?*

It's a scary concept. As parents, we want to see our kids succeed in everything they do—whether it's acing their science homework, making the varsity softball team, or simply making a sandwich without smearing peanut butter and jelly all over the kitchen.

To help our children realize success, we often inundate them with constant reminders, prodding questions, and superhero-like maneuvers to rescue them when we see a risk of failure. Or even worse, parents go to deceptive lengths to manufacture success for their children.

**But does that hurt more than help?**

### Why Rescuing Children Does More Harm Than Good

We're well-intentioned parents. We all want our kids to be happy and feel good about themselves and their accomplishments.

But when kids don't experience what it's like to fail, they miss the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and don't learn how to improve for the future. Furthermore, they'll begin to lack the confidence to take risks and won't courageously face their problems head-on or roll with the punches.

Or, worse still, when we rescue our kids, they may come to believe things always work out—and we all know that's simply not true.

According to child and adolescent psychologist Dr. Jennifer Hartstein, "kids who are constantly bailed out of problem situations will come to avoid situations where they might fail. As they grow older, that can increase anxiety and depression

when they need to depend on themselves in tough situations.”

When we allow our kids to face failure, they learn to find creative solutions to their problems.

**So, let’s ask again:** *Should I let my kids fail?*

Making mistakes is a part of everyday life.

### **Mistakes make us human, not failures.**

Mistakes are a chance to learn and will help us adapt to new and difficult situations as we encounter them throughout life.

In the long run, making mistakes and learning from them will give our kids MORE self-confidence and resiliency than when we swoop in to save them from failure.

While we don’t need to set our kids up for failure, here are 5 strategies to help kids face potential failure.

## **5 Strategies to Face Failure and Learn From It**

### **1. Take a leap – as a family.**

Let your kids know that risk-taking is an important value in your family. Share with your children how you’ve made mistakes and kept on trying.

Then, reinforce this belief with your actions. When your kid makes a mistake, don’t come down hard—encourage the effort, withhold judgment and be an empathetic ear.

When risk-taking is a family value, kids will WANT to take on new challenges and experiences,—whether it’s trying the scariest roller coaster in the park or signing up for calculus. You’ll also be more comfortable trying things outside your comfort zone—like picking up a hammer for Habitat for Humanity, learning a new language or starting a new exercise program.

Difficult things are less difficult when done as a team—encourage your family to be the core catalyst for risk-taking and you’ll be amazed how courageous you all become.

### **2. It’s okay for failure to be familiar.**

No matter what it is—tying our shoes, sinking free throws or diagramming a sentence—we’re bound to have a few hiccups along the way as we learn. Make sure your kids know to expect some failures as they try new things and let them know that it’s normal and expected. Emphasize the positives of learning from your mistakes and how we can learn from our miscues.

Wendy Flynn said, “Allow yourself to be a beginner, no one starts off being excellent.” When kids (and adults) truly believe this, it’s possible to see failures with rose-colored glasses. Instead of setbacks, failures become steps forward to life-long learning and success.

### **3. Look at those who have risen above.**

Some of the most successful people in the world, from business tycoons to all-star athletes, had to overcome major obstacles and failures throughout their careers—think Michael Jordan, Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey, to name a few.

Share these stories with your children and pepper the conversation with personal stories of how you’ve improved following difficulties in your own life.

### **4. Run a post-game analysis.**

While we naturally want to step in when our kids fail, we

need to avoid rescuing them. We can, however, support them and do a run-down of what happened and what to try next time.

Try empathizing, saying, “*I can tell that was hard for you. Now that you’ve been through this, what would you try next time?*”

Don’t solve all the problems for them, but allow them to build up their critical thinking skills and develop a plan for the future.

### **5. Support your student by letting go.**

Many times parents feel just as much pressure for their kids to bring home a straight-A report card as the students

## **Foster Youth Internship Program**

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute’s (CCAI) Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program® is a congressional internship for young adults who spent time in the foster care system. The FYI Program began in 2003 as an effort to raise awareness to federal policymakers about the needs and unique perspectives of children and youth in foster care.

During the program, CCAI organizes retreats, advocacy trainings and various networking opportunities with experts in the child welfare field for our Foster Youth Interns. While participating in a congressional office summer internship, the FYI Program interns spend time researching policy issues affecting children and youth in the U.S. foster care system. These experiences allow the interns to create a policy report that is presented to Members of Congress and their staff and released to child welfare advocates across the country. There are 227 exceptional alumni of the Foster Youth Internship Program® to date.

While participating in the program, federal policymakers are shown firsthand the experiences of youth in foster care, and as a result go on to use their new knowledge to inspire legislative change. Interns participating in this program benefit both personally and professionally, gaining experience and skills that will bolster their careers for years to come and with a foundation to be lifelong advocates for improving the foster care system.

This is a competitive congressional internship for students in college, university, or vocational school and recent graduates. In this internship program, participants will be placed in the Washington, D.C. legislative offices of Members of the U.S. Congress and write a federal child welfare policy report throughout the course of the summer.

The application for CCAI’s 2023 Foster Youth Internship Program® will open the first week of September. If you are interested in receiving more information about the Foster Youth Internship Program®, please contact CCAI’s Programs Coordinator, Sara Schleicher, at [sara@ccainstitute.org](mailto:sara@ccainstitute.org).

do. School is one of the hardest places to let our kids fail, but it's one of the best—and most important—places for them to learn to take on responsibility for their own success.

Learning to manage assignments and practices, dealing with teachers and classmates, and improving their work will all serve them well as they head to college and the workforce. This doesn't mean you need to completely withdraw yourself from your kids' academic responsibilities or extracurricular activities—just offer the right kind of support.

Be clear that your child's academics are completely their responsibility, and give them the tools and resources to solve problems when they arise. Help them to recognize when they may be struggling and how to deal with it—talking to the teacher after class or studying with a friend, for example.

### Letter from the Editor

Wow! Seems impossible that I should be writing about the end of summer and school starting. I hope that all of you have enjoyed time with your children this summer! As the school year begins, I would like to remind all of you that **YOU** can be the difference between your children getting their needs met in school and being left behind. Please keep the lines of communication open between the school, yourself and the birth parents (remember, birth parents still have educational rights). It was fun putting this issue together. I wanted a full issue with mostly school topics. This issue will cover topics like, IEPs, advocating for your kids at school, what to tell the teachers about your foster child, plus much more. I also added an article about generational trauma. I wanted to remind you of our Tuesday Night Faces, chat with other parents in a safe place, with others who have been in your shoes. It's great to share ideas and advice that you may need or pass on to others. We are combining our two Zoom support groups into one. This is worth CEU's, plus you get to fill up your foster parent tool box. With that, have a wonderful school year! Oh, by the way, don't forget to take our Monkey Survey for CEU points. Have a Great Fall!

*Tammy Welker*



**Run through how a meeting with a teacher to discuss a test grade might go—but make sure your student goes to the teacher, not you.**

### Final Thoughts

If the report card comes home with poor grades, let your kid experience the consequences of the situation to truly learn an important lesson. Encourage and support them in raising their grades, but make sure the responsibility to improve is in their hands.

As they earn grades that they've worked so hard to achieve, they'll be proud of what they've done, and they'll have a great work ethic and sense of responsibility to carry them through college and beyond.

Disappointment is a regular aspect of all our lives, so the answer to "should I let my kids fail?" is clear: **giving our kids the tools they need to roll with the punches and bounce back from failure will be a lesson that will serve them the rest of their life.**

As much as we'd like to, we can't protect our kids forever, but we can give them the skills to be the best they can be. Early experiences with failure will help them make tough decisions as they grow older and ultimately guide their successes.

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*[https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/should-i-let-my-kids-fail?fbclid=IwAR1KAYW8VH1PH36ChqZZedwWsTjx425d1uUDgUER5ErCcMV\\_XJ9AiEVbxno](https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/should-i-let-my-kids-fail?fbclid=IwAR1KAYW8VH1PH36ChqZZedwWsTjx425d1uUDgUER5ErCcMV_XJ9AiEVbxno)*

**September is  
Kinship Care  
Month!**





# Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association WORKSHOPS

The Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association presents three in-service trainings to foster and adoptive parents. RSVP is required! Sign-up today.

## ▶ **September 10, 2022 Just Keep Swimming: Thriving in the midst of Grief and Loss** 9:00 am—11:00 am CT—Virtual (Zoom)

While there is beauty in loving and caring for children in an adoptive, foster or kinship family, there are also various levels of grief and loss. We feel emptiness when a child moves on to another placement or is reunified, sadness when we see how trauma experiences have impacted their lives, and grief when we realize our kids' developmental differences might not allow for typical development. It is important to figure out ways to work through grief and loss without getting stuck in the seaweed. We must learn to "just keep swimming."

Presented by Barb Clark from North American Council on Adoptable Children

2-hours of in-service credit

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/In-Service2022>

## ▶ **September 17, 2022 FLIP IT! Transforming Challenging Behavior**

9:00 am-4:00 pm CT—In-person in Grand Island

Do you know what to do and say when a child has some challenging behaviors? Attend this FLIP IT training! It explains FLIP IT's four simple steps for transforming challenging behavior in young children:

**F – Feelings      L – Limits      I – Inquiries      P – Prompts**

This straight forward and practical approach to addressing behaviors can help children learn about their feelings and gain self-control.

Presented by Terry Robinson from NFAPA

6-hours of in-service credit

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/In-Service2022>

## ▶ **September 24 & 25, 2022 Spaulding: Making the Commitment to Adoption**

**In-person in North Platte 9:00 am-5:30 pm CT on Saturday & 1:00 pm-5:00 pm CT on Sunday**

Spaulding training offers families the tools and information that they need to:

1. Explain how adoptive families are different
2. Importance of separation, loss, and grief in adoption
3. Understand attachment and its importance in adoption
4. Anticipate challenges and be able to identify strategies for managing challenges as an adoptive family
5. Explore the lifelong commitment to a child that adoption bring

Presented by Robbi Blume from NFAPA

12-hours of in-service credit

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SpauldingSept2022>

**You must register to attend! Registration closes the day before training.  
Questions? Contact the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association at  
402-476-2273 or [Corinne@nfapa.org](mailto:Corinne@nfapa.org)**



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## JOIN NFAPA ....your support will enable NFAPA to continue supporting foster parents state-wide!

### Benefits

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

### Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:  
**NFAPA, 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): \_\_\_\_\_

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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, \$ \_\_\_\_\_