

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

November/December 2019

N F A N P A

9 WAYS TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

National Adoption Awareness Month is here! It's a month-long event to encourage people to learn about adoption, recognize people who have been impacted by adoption, and organize positive adoption-related events. There are many ways you and your family can learn and participate this year!

Here are nine ways you can celebrate National Adoption Month:

1. Retell Your Child's Adoption Story to Them

Set a time where you can sit and talk with your child about their adoption story. You can also create a memory book that tells your child's story before and after adoption.

2. Spread Awareness through Social Media

Social media is one of the most effective ways to increase awareness about adoption. Share your family's adoption story on Instagram and Facebook. To participate, include the hashtag #NationalAdoptionMonth in your posts.

3. Watch Positive Adoption-Related Movies with Your Family

Sit back and grab some popcorn with your child and watch some positive adoption themed movies and discuss the movie afterward. Here are a few ideas!

4. Read a book together that promotes the values of adoption

As we approach the holiday season, it is the perfect time to snuggle up together and read an adoption related book. Here are some examples of great children's books about adoption.

5. Donate Time and Money to a Local Organization that Supports Adoption

Teach your child about giving back to the community and support adoption awareness by donating time and money to a local organization that supports adoption.

6. Write a 'Thank You' Letter

Since we're so close to Thanksgiving, what better way to show gratitude than thanking the people who worked so hard made your adoption possible? Write a thank you letter to the social worker, attorney, judge, or other professional who helped you in the adoption process. Send a heartfelt thank you note to your child's birth parents as well.

7. Celebrate Your Child's Heritage

Cook a traditional dish with your child to celebrate his or her heritage. In addition, you can also play traditional games or activities and make holiday crafts to demonstrate appreciation for different cultures, especially your child's own heritage.

8. Join Local Events that Encourage Community Participation

Participate in an event that celebrates National Adoption Awareness. Check online to see events near you. If you don't find any events near you, you can always register and host your own event!

9. Educate Yourself and People around You about Adoption

Continue learning about adoption by either reading books or magazines related to adoption, read blogs written by birth parents, adoptees, or adoptive parents, or going to speaking engagements that educate people about adoption.

There are so many ways to participate, get involved, and spread awareness about adoption. Celebrate National Adoption Awareness Month with us and many others!



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<https://www.adopthelp.com/9-ways-celebrate-national-adoption-awareness-month/>

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

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Questions? Interested in becoming a member of the Board?

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

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Attention Foster Parents!

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

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will 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/NovDec2019> 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!

- List 3 ways to celebrate National Adoption Day.
- List 5 ways to nurture your child's mental health.
- Name one thing you are grateful for in foster care?
- True or False. Big days can be a reminder of all that they have lost or of how their brain works differently than other people's do or of how far their behavior is from what they want it to be.
- Fill in the blanks. _____ in children who have been adopted or who have had one parent leave the family can lead to a deep sense of shame.
- True or False. For students with ACEs, traditional punishments cannot unintentionally re-traumatize and reactivate their stress response systems.
- Fill in the blanks. _____ is powerful way to calm an agitated and angry student.
- Fill in the blanks. But life is about loving each other in spite of our _____, in spite of our _____.
- What does CASA stand for?
- What does a CASA do?

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Families First Newsletter Issue: November/December 2019

The Role of Emotion Co-Regulation in Discipline

Helping students regain their calm after misbehavior doesn't mean there are no consequences—it ensures that the right lesson is learned.

by Lori Desautles



Our schools are currently seeing a dramatic increase in students of all ages carrying in anxiety, adversity, and trauma from a variety of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Social and emotional learning programs are critical for addressing these emotional and mental challenges, but we must also rethink our discipline procedures and policies. We need to understand that traditional discipline works best with the children who need it the least, and works least with the children who need it the most. Discipline ideally is not something we do to students—it should be a quality we want to develop within them.

For students with ACEs, traditional punishments can unintentionally retraumatize and reactivate their stress response systems. Recent research in school discipline is grounded in the neuroscience of attachment, which emphasizes the significance of relationships. Those relationships begin with an adult in a regulated, calm brain state. It takes a calm brain to calm another brain—this co-regulation is something that students with ACEs may have missed out on. Their school can be an environment where they feel safe and connected even when they make poor choices.

This doesn't mean giving students a pass for misbehavior: There are still consequences for poor choices, but regulating the feelings and sensations a student is experiencing is the initial step, one that is critical for a sustainable change in

behavior.

Emotions are contagious, and when a teacher is able to model a calm presence through their tone, facial expression, and posture, students are less likely to react defensively. When the teacher listens to what is beneath the behavior, focusing on the student's feelings, this type of validation says to the child that the teacher sees them and is trying to understand. When the teacher takes deep breaths, gets a drink of water, and creates space for reflection for a minute or two, they are modeling the regulation skills they want to see from students.

CO-REGULATING BEHAVIOR WITH STUDENTS

If I'm the teacher, co-regulation—the process of helping a student who has made a poor choice of behavior to regain their composure—begins with the awareness of my own sensations and feelings when I am disciplining the student. It entails a willingness to regulate my own brain before I act on that discipline. Personally, I try to commit to three quick routines that feel doable to calm me in a short period of time: taking three deep breaths, texting a friend or pulling an affirmation from a prepared jar, and stretching and moving for a minute.

It's much better to wait for a few minutes when we're feeling irritated and angry before we discipline, and this is also excellent modeling for students. Students read our nonverbal communication, so paying attention to our facial expression and posture in addition to our tone of voice is critical when teaching the behaviors we want to see.

Focusing on the student's sensations and the feelings that lie beneath the behavior help us to understand the root causes and patterns of a behavior we might discover when there is rising irritation and anger. I may have a minute or two to redirect—by suggesting that the student go and get a drink of water or take a couple of deep breaths to calm down with me before we talk about the problem.

Creating a friend-in-need system could be helpful so each student has a buddy or even another adult in the building to go to when they begin to feel agitated. For the friend-in-need system, teachers ask students to select one or two peers or adults at the school who they trust and feel comfortable with if they need to take a break and be in another environment or talk through those challenging moments. This is preventative discipline and a way for students to have options when they begin to feel negative. These calming strategies are taught ahead of time and become a part of our procedures and classroom agreements or guidelines.

Validation is powerful way to calm an agitated and angry student. It's calming to be understood and felt by another. Some things you can say to help a student feel validated:

- “That must feel awful.”
- “You seem really angry.”
- “You seem really frustrated.”
- “What a difficult situation you're in.”

Validation opens the door for teacher and student to discuss choices and consequences and to create a plan of action for the next time there's a conflict.

I once heard that it is critical that a teacher's brain should resemble a thermostat rather than a thermometer when it comes to disciplining a student. What does this mean? Like a thermostat, the teacher needs to maintain a steady temperature throughout a moment of conflict, with a goal of creating conversation and a plan of action with a student who understands their choices and the consequences of those actions. The teacher needs to model the behaviors they want to see and to model self-care and respect during the discipline process.

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<https://www.edutopia.org/article/role-emotion-co-regulation-discipline>

Stop Withholding Gifts from Your Foster Kids

by Anonymous

Merry Christmas, everyone!

I wanted to do a short post today in response to questions I've been hearing about how to handle Christmas presents for foster children. I've seen several posts on social media where foster families believe in keeping things minimal for their biological children but don't know what to do when their foster children receive loads of presents from the agency, The Giving Tree, or their biological parents. Do they refuse the gifts? Put them away until the kids reunify? Send them back with the parents at the next visit? And what if a child moves or reunifies right before Christmas? Do you send the gifts with the child even if they won't be maintained or if you suspect the parents will sell the gifts instead of letting the kids play with them? Or do you keep the gifts in case you have a new placement arriving on Christmas?

First of all, I would encourage foster parents to look at the big picture. When I'm faced with a tough decision involving my foster children, I try to imagine how my decision will make them feel 5 or 10 years later when they look back on their time in care. From a foster parent's perspective, it may seem unfair to your biological children that your fosters have piles of presents, and it may feel like the values or traditions you worked so hard to establish with your family are being compromised to accommodate them.

But pause.

Put yourself in your foster children's shoes. What message are you sending if you withhold gifts meant for them because you don't want to deal with toys cluttering their room or your own children's hurt feelings? Years from now, will they thank you because you stuck to your family's traditions and sent

back gifts you felt were superfluous? Chances are, they won't look back and reminisce on how grateful they feel. No matter how well-intentioned you are, consider whether or not your most well-intentioned actions will be lost in translation.

Stop making executive decisions based on how it'll inconvenience you, and start making choices based on how it can benefit and support your fosters. The holidays are hard for kids in care. How can you make this Christmas a positive experience that will stand out for years to come?

Many of these kids have had things taken from them time and time again. How can you press the reset button on the expectation that this Christmas will be no different, that being in your home will be no different?

Does it matter if your foster child will be with another family on Christmas? No, if you bought gifts for them, give them their gifts. Does it matter if your foster child will appreciate all the money you spent? No, giving shouldn't have strings attached. Does it matter if your foster child will treat the gift with care? No, if your moody teenage foster son wants to burn the nice present you got in the backyard, so be it. He won't get as much long-term enjoyment out of it, but that's his choice. Next year buy him fireworks instead of an iPod.

If they were your children in care, how would you want them to be treated? How would you feel if the gifts you worked hard to provide for them were sent back to you on the next visit? I imagine if any one of us were separated from our children on Christmas, we'd go all out on gifts to communicate to our children how much we love them. We'd fight for holiday visitation. We'd do all the things that inconvenience foster parents and make them vent on social media.

If we just thought a little bit more about how love is being communicated to our foster children, these big decisions wouldn't seem like such big decisions. We'd make adjustments without being resentful. Our Christmases would look different than they did before we became foster parents. And at every turn, we'd work hard to put ourselves in their shoes.

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<https://www.stillorphans.com/2018/12/25/stop-withholding-gifts-from-your-foster-kids/>

The Holidays in Foster Care: Why Things Might Get Rough

by Billy Flynn

During the holidays, we are inundated with messages from a number of sources (movies, music, TV, social media, commercials) about how we should be feeling joyful, happy, and thankful. Surrounded by loving (and attractive) family, laughter, fancy food served at perfectly set tables and loads of expensive gifts, these images rarely reflect the truth for the

majority of people. For children in foster care, conflicting loyalties and lost dreams can make the holidays an even more especially difficult time. They often report feeling especially vulnerable, lonely and sad, at a time when they are expected to feel exactly the opposite.

What can those of us caring for these children and youth do or say to ease the pain?

Here are some things you might do:

1. Prepare the foster youth in your care for the holidays in your home

Have a discussion with the young person about your family's holiday customs. Do you celebrate over multiple days, or is there one "main" celebration? Are there religious customs? Will gifts be exchanged? What should they wear? Who will they meet? What preparations need to be done in advance? Will there be visitors to the home? Will they be taken on visits to the homes of other family or friends? And in all of these events, will your youth be expected to participate? Knowing what to expect will help to decrease anxiety around the holidays. Avoid surprises and you will decrease seasonal tensions.

Of equal importance is to help them talk about their memories of the holidays. Be prepared for anything from fantasies to reports of no memories of anything at all. Give them space to talk and be prepared to validate any feelings they may share with you. Find ways to incorporate any traditions they remember into your family's celebration.

2. Prepare friends and family before you visit

Let people know in advance about new family members in your home. Surprising a host or hostess at the door with a "new" foster youth may set up an awkward situation — such as a scramble to set an extra place at the table — making the young person feel like an imposition right from the start of the visit. Your preparation of friends should help cut down on awkward, but reasonable questions such as "who are you?" or "where did you come from?"

Also prepare the youth for what to expect. Talk about upcoming events and the people who will be there. If they have not met before, introduce them with old photos or stories about them. Prepare them for the "characters" in your family. Tell them if the celebration will be formal or informal, what to wear, what they will do there, if it is a quiet or loud affair, and how long you will stay. If "please" and "thank you" will be expected, role play with the youth until they are comfortable with such expressions.

3. Remember confidentiality

You may receive well-intended but prying questions from those you visit with over the holidays. If your young person is new to your home, it is natural that family members ask questions about your youth's background. As much as

possible, have these conversations ahead of time, without the youth present. Understand that questions are generally not meant to be insensitive or rude, but simply come from a place of not knowing much about foster care. Think in advance about how to answer these questions while maintaining your youth's confidentiality. Use the opportunity to educate interested family and friends. Pre-establish the boundaries for information sharing.

Discuss with your young person how they would like to be introduced and what is appropriate to share about their history with your family and friends. (Remember, they have no obligation to reveal their past.) Help them to set boundaries and consider a private "signal" to use if they feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed.

4. Arrange meeting your family in advance, if possible

The hustle and bustle of the holidays can make it particularly chaotic for your young person to participate in your family traditions. Anxiety may run high for young people already, and the stress of meeting your relatives may be a lot to deal with. If possible, you can arrange a casual "meeting" in advance of "main events." If it is not possible or practical to meet beforehand, make a list of names of some of the people they'll meet and their connection to you. You can also encourage a quick call from relatives you plan to visit to deliver a personal message of "we are excited to meet you" so that your youth knows they will be welcome. Consider making a "hostess" gift with the youth to present to the host of the party. Homemade gifts are always welcome!

5. Have extra presents ready to help offset differences

It should not be expected that all relatives purchase presents for your youth. Be prepared with other small gifts and for those family members that express concern over not having brought a gift, offer one of your "backups" for them to place under the tree. Extra presents may be addressed "from Santa", even for older youth, to help offset a larger number of gifts other children may receive at the same time. Children often keep count of the number of gifts received (right or wrong) and use it to compare with other kids, so sometimes quantity is important.

At times, foster youth receive gifts from people they do not know. Asking a child to identify gift(s) for their wish list is often met with confusion, resistance or other equally charged emotions. We have to remind ourselves that our excitement and enthusiasm for these types of gifts may not be their experience. In some circumstances, these youth may not have celebrated Christmas before or they are not used to asking for a "gift" but rather for some basic need (i.e., toiletries or food). When encouraged to think "bigger"—beyond just what they need and ask for something that they want—foster children often struggle. Intense thoughts and fears arise: Am I disloyal

to my birth parents by requesting/accepting gifts? Does this mean I won't be home by Christmas?

It's often our role to help foster youth understand that the community's desire to give them gifts means only that they are loved. You may need to guard against well-meaning people's desire to "give a happy holiday for such a deprived, abused little child," protecting the children from such toxic sentiments.

6. Facilitate visits with loved ones

The holidays can be a busy time for everyone including foster parents and caseworkers. But it is especially important during this time of year to help your young person arrange for visits with loved ones. Don't allow busy schedules to mean the postponement of these important visits. Try to get permission for your youth to make phone calls to relatives. A youth may wish to extend holiday wishes to relatives and friends from an old neighborhood, but may need your help getting phone numbers together. Use the opportunity to help the youth develop their own address book. If the youth cannot visit, consider including their birth families in your thoughts and prayers. If you are making homemade gifts, consider making ones for the birth family, even if they cannot be delivered immediately.

This is a time when many foster youth feel deeply conflicted about their birth families and worry about them. It is a good time to let them know it is okay for them to be safe and cared for even if their birth family is struggling. Reassure them, if you can, about the safety and care of those they are missing.

7. Help them make sure their loved ones are okay

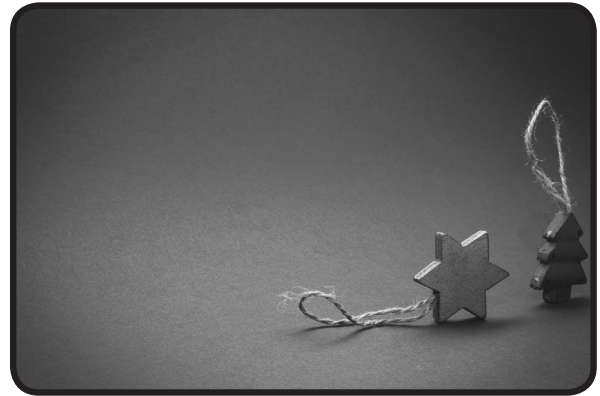
Young people may worry that their family members are struggling through the holidays. If homelessness has been a regular issue, the winter season may bring cold weather and extreme hardship. Your youth may experience guilt if they feel a loved one is struggling while they, the youth, are living in comfort. Knowing that a biological parent or sibling has shelter from the cold or has their other basic needs met may ease a young person's mind through the always emotional holidays.

8. Extend an invitation

If it is safe and allowed by your foster care agency, consider extending an invitation to siblings or birth parents through the holidays. It need not be an invitation to your "main" holiday event, consider a "special" dinner for your youth to celebrate with their loved ones. If this not a possibility to do within your home, consider arranging a visit at a local restaurant (ask the caseworker is it would be appropriate for the visit to be unsupervised or if your supervision would suffice). Extending an invitation to their loved ones need not signal to a young person that you support their birth family's lifestyle or choices — rather it tells a young person that you respect their wish to stay connected to family. You will also send a message to the

youth that they aren't being put in a position to "choose" your family over their bio-family and that it is possible to have a relationship with all the people they care about.

9. Understand and encourage your youth's own traditions and beliefs



Encourage discussion about the holiday traditions your young person experienced prior to being in foster care, or even celebrations they liked while living with other foster families. Incorporate the traditions the youth cherishes into your own family celebration, if possible. Use the opportunity to investigate the youth's culture and research customary traditions. If the young person holds a religious belief different from yours, or if their family did, check into the traditions customarily surrounding those beliefs.

10. Assist in purchasing or making holiday gifts or in sending cards to their family and friends

Allow young people to purchase small gifts for their relatives, or help them craft homemade gifts. Help send holiday cards to those that they want to stay connected with. The list of people that your youth wishes to send cards and gifts to should be left completely to the youth, although precautions may be taken to ensure safety (for example, a return address may be left off the package, or use the address of the foster care agency) and compliance with any court orders.

11. Understand if they pull away

Despite your best efforts, a young person may simply withdraw during the holidays. Understand that this detachment most likely is not intended to be an insult or a reflection of how they feel about you, but rather is their own coping mechanism. Allow for "downtime" during the holidays that will allow the youth some time to themselves if they need it (although some youth would prefer to stay busy to keep their mind off other things — you will need to make a decision based on your knowledge of the young person). Be sure to fit in one-on-one time, personal time for your youth and you to talk through what they are feeling during this emotional and often confusing time of year.

12. Call youth who formerly lived with you

The holidays can be a particularly tough time for youth who have recently aged out of foster care. They may not have

people to visit or a place to go for the holidays. In addition, young people commonly struggle financially when they first leave foster care. A single phone call may lift their spirits and signal that you continue to care for them and treasure their friendship. Be sure to include these youth on your own holiday card list. A small token gift or gift basket of homemade holiday goodies may be especially appreciated. Most importantly, it is essential to let adoptees, foster children, and those who have aged out of the system know that they are not alone and they are not to blame for their losses.

Understandable behavioral reactions:

Be prepared for the sadness and grief. Talk about your child's feelings throughout the season.

Give your children time and space to grieve. Grief takes many forms and may be exhibited in lots of ways, including:

- Reverting back to younger behaviors developmentally
- Soiling themselves or bedwetting
- Becoming withdrawn and isolated
- Having temper tantrums
- Being rebellious
- Complaining more than usual
- Needing to be extra busy to avoid feeling

Try to remember the developmental age of the children you foster. It will also help you to stay patient if you keep in mind the challenges of the season for your child before you react.

Expressions of gratitude don't often come readily from kids in foster care. Not because they aren't grateful, but more often because they are in survival mode, especially during the holidays. Amazingly, more kids than not want to know who they can thank for their gifts. Help them to write thank you notes or make "thank you" phone calls to those who made their day extra special.

Religious Differences & the Holidays

The holidays can be tough for foster families. Children in care miss their families and their traditions, while at the same time they may want to be part of the activities of the foster family. When there's a religious difference between the child's family and the foster family, things can become even more complicated.

Religion can be a sensitive issue. Legally, birth parents have the right to choose their children's religion or lack of religion. Placement of their child in foster care does not take away this right.

Of course, most foster parents try to respect the culture and religious customs of the children in their care. But what does this mean when it comes to religion?

The answer lies in establishing open lines of communication among foster parents, DSS, and the birth family. If your agency knows how you feel about religious issues (for example, if prayer makes you feel uncomfortable, or if you feel compelled

to convert children and their families), it will make informed placement decisions.

This communication works both ways. The more you know about the religion, traditions, and preferences of birth families, the easier it will be for you to act in a way that honors their beliefs.

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<https://www.foster-adopt.org/blog/the-holidays-in-foster-care-why-things-might-get-rough/>

5 REASONS TO ADOPT A TEEN AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

IN THE US, MORE THAN **100,000** YOUTH WAIT IN FOSTER CARE. EACH YEAR, MORE THAN **20,000** YOUTH "AGE OUT" OF CARE.

TURNING 18 DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE NEED FOR LOVING, PERMANENT PARENTS.

HERE ARE 5 WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY ADOPTING AN OLDER TEEN

- 1 TEACH THEM ABOUT MONEY MANAGEMENT**
As a young adult, your newest family member will need support as she learns skills such as how to budget, pay bills, and build credit (not to mention warning against the pitfall of credit card offers).
- 2 HELP WITH APPLICATIONS**
Applying for jobs and college can be daunting and stressful. Help your newly-adopted teen navigate questions or take it a step further by preparing him with mock interviews.
- 3 BUILD THEIR CONFIDENCE FOR SELF-ADVOCACY**
Model healthy relationships and self-advocacy so your new son or daughter learns how to speak up about his needs at home and advocate for her skills in professional environments.
- 4 PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**
Because of their histories, foster care youth especially need emotional support and encouragement during this coming-of-age moment when we all discover the responsibility and change that accompanies adulthood.
- 5 CREATE A PLACE THEY CAN CALL "HOME"**
Many youth live with their parents well past their 18th birthday, and even if your new teen has his own apartment, having the stability of a place to call "home" in good times and bad is priceless.

<https://chss.org/blog/infographic-5-reasons-to-adopt-a-teen-aging-out-of-foster-care/>

LEARN ABOUT MN FOSTER CARE ADOPTION BY VISITING CHLSS.ORG/FOSTERCAREADoption
Statistics on foster care youth from dave.thomas.foundation.org/learn/research

The Official Program of
Children's Home Society
of Minnesota
Lutheran Social Service
of Minnesota
for changing lives

No Longer Fostering? We Would Love To Hear From You.

Foster parenting is HARD! It takes a special person to care for hurting children. Many of you have decided to no longer provide foster care. We are interested to learn about families leaving foster care and the reasons behind their decision. This information can assist us to advocate for future policies to support foster families. If you are a former foster parent, please take a moment to provide feedback on your foster care experience.

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

Waiting for a Forever HOME!

The following are children available on the Nebraska Heart Gallery.



Name: Amari

12 years old

Amari is an active, athletic young man. He loves basketball the most but also enjoys a good game of football. Amari is funny and has a great sense of humor. He is also a very tidy person, and takes pride in ensuring his belongings are neat and well organized. One of Amari's amazing talents is his ability to memorize statistics of his favorite athletes. Amari

loves to engage in conversation and will talk about sports at any opportunity he has. He also enjoys playing electronics and board games. Amari is most successful with routines and structure within the home. He also does best when he knows what to expect for the day. He enjoys staying busy. Amari likes to have one on one attention and thrives from those opportunities. He is compassionate and caring with those who care about him.

Connections:

Amari will need to remain connected to his sister.



Name: Zachary M

12 years old

Zachary is extremely outgoing and really enjoys playing video games and football. You can find Zachary every Sunday cheering on his favorite team, the Kansas City Chiefs. Zachary loves all types of animals. Zachary has recently started learning about the 4H club and has shown some interest in possibly joining in the future. He has recently started

playing the trumpet in the school band and so far seems to like it well! Zachary would benefit from a loving family who can advocate for his needs and to help him grow and be successful in all aspects of his life.

Connections:

Zachary will need to maintain his relationship with his sister



Name: Kayden

3 years old

Kayden is a medically fragile child who requires specialized care. He loves to laugh, smile, and cuddle. He likes all kinds of toys and is a fan of funny noises and bright lights. He is good

with other kids and loves to hold babies. Kayden would thrive in a home that keeps him involved and pushes him every day. He has shown great improvements with the enthusiasm and positive energy individuals have provided him on a day to day basis. Kayden is a strong little boy and has overcome many challenges life has brought him.

Connections:

Kayden has a few biological connections he will need help maintaining on an ongoing basis. They are his Grandma, Aunt, Mother and Father.

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

Email: scaldararo@childsaving.org

Phone: 402-504-3673

National Adoption Month

National Adoption Month is celebrated in November. It started over two decades ago in Massachusetts with Adoption Week. In 1984, President Regan had the first National Adoption Week. President Clinton then expanded it in 1995 to National Adoption Month for November. This year November 23 is National Adoption Day where we celebrate forever families across the nation and the many families that will be adopting on this special day. Let's express the joys of expanding our families to provide permanent loving homes for young people in foster care while still remembering the many children still in the foster care system waiting for a permanent home.

Learn more at:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam/about/history/>

Thanksgiving Tips for Foster Parents:

Today when I was walking Moonlight and Shadow through my new neighborhood, I passed a house that had a huge blow-up turkey outside. Moonlight tried to attack it and Shadow barked as it moved with the bursts of wind. I stood there, realizing that I really liked it because it was a “happy” turkey and it made me think about the Thanksgivings I experienced in foster care.

If you never read about my first Thanksgiving, READ THIS, which covers it and can provide insight into a foster child’s fears (I just re-read it and found it very moving). After that first Thanksgiving, some were good, some were bad, and some were non-existent. As I stood there looking at the happy turkey blow-up, I thought of things that were really meaningful to me as a foster kid... at Thanksgiving.

1) What is Thanksgiving?

Ok, seriously, to this day, I still am not 100% sure what Thanksgiving is really about. Pilgrims, Indians, food, turkey, eating tons...is kind of my idea. So see? Share the history and meaning of Thanksgiving with your foster children. They may have never heard it. More importantly, it can help show foster children how “different people” can be together, celebrate together, and be thankful. Different cultures, different backgrounds... but still being together.

2) Prepare Now!

Thanksgiving can be very overwhelming to a foster child. Lots of food! Lots of people! Manners needed! Start explaining before Thanksgiving, what is going to happen, who is going to be there, what foods there will be, that there will be plenty for everyone, and what expectations you have for manners. Remember, most foster kids have food issues. Since Thanksgiving focuses a lot on food, make sure to re-assure your foster children or have plans to address their needs. Get special bags or tupperware and label it so that your foster child has their own “storage” for left-overs. Have food “rules” in place — If you want 2 pieces of pie, you must eat one vegetable. Don’t force the child to eat everything on their plate; respect their feeling of being full.

I wanted to take so much because I was afraid that I would not get any, with so many people around. I was afraid it would be all gone because I was the “little person.” Survival mode went into action. ... One Thanksgiving, I remember taking 3 rolls and piling them on my plate. As my hand went for the cranberries (which I didn’t even really like), my foster mom gently stopped me and asked me if I really wanted all 3 rolls on my plate. I didn’t want them at that moment, but I wanted to make sure they were there for me, when I did want them! MINE! Solution: 2 rolls were removed from my plate and put aside on a separate plate in the kitchen for when I needed to have them later. I never did ...

3) Special foods.

Some people have special foods on Thanksgiving, besides or in place of the traditional. Remember your foster kids! Ask them if there is anything they would like! A vegetable? A dessert? or even a special drink? One foster home I lived at poured apple cider with desert. Have you ever had cold apple cider with hot apple pie? Holy shit. Awesome combination!

4) Giving Thanks.

You want to make a foster kid’s Thanksgiving? Before you eat, give thanks that they are there with you, celebrating in your home. Why? Because so many foster kids feel like they don’t belong, that no-one wants them, that they are problems, etc.... Very rarely do they hear good things about themselves. Say good things on Thanksgiving day! Let everyone know you are thankful for them.

5) Respect the sadness.

Please remember that holidays are hard for foster kids. Holidays = family days... and foster kids come from messed up families. Irregardless of abuse, kids long for their parents. Sometimes at holidays, sadness takes over as kids think about their bioparents or biosiblings. They may feel sad for being away, they may feel sad because they are celebrating and their parents are not or did not, they may feel sad wondering if their parents are ok, they may feel sad because they wonder why “their family” can’t be like this... sadness and holidays go together.

If the child wants to talk, be ready to talk about “their” holidays. Ask appropriate questions, following the child’s lead. Be prepared to share your empathy for things the child did not have with their bioparents. Don’t simply say “well you have it now,”... because that is NOT the point. Don’t ignore the sadness, because then the child is alone. Remember it does not reflect you, but feel honored that the child wants to share “their” life with you, during these times.

6. Punishment.

Don’t threaten taking away Thanksgiving or making a child miss it. It is a shitty thing to do to children who are already missing so much in their lives! Taking things or events away from children who have so little, but yet so much trauma, is going to backfire. Children will either get worse or they will shut down. Holidays bring increased anxiety and feelings... and “problem behaviors” might escalate. Find creative ways to handle the “problems”...such as engaging the child in helping to prepare for the holiday; cooking with you, making decorations, cleaning with you, raking leaves, etc. Engage, don’t isolate.

As I stared at the happy turkey blow-up balloon, I realized the last time I celebrated Thanksgiving was when I was 17 years old. I turned 18 in October and aged-out onto the streets, where Thanksgiving was just a fading memory as I struggled to survive. Admit the sadness I felt recalling the years that have passed by, I found moments of joy reminiscing about the “good” Thanksgivings I had growing up in foster care. Far fewer than most people, but still something to hold onto...

Do your best, to make positive memories for your foster children this year...

...you never know when and where they might need them in the future...



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<http://www.ma-cf.org/ServicesOffered/FosterCareProgram/FosterParentHomePage/ThanksgivingTIPSforFosterParents/tabid/303/Default.aspx>

100 Everyday Ways to Strengthen Your Child's Mental Health

by ANGELA PRUESS

If you had only one wish for your child's future what would it be?

Many of us would say "I want my child to be happy", but what does that really mean?

Would it mean your child would grow up to love who they are as a person, knowing their strengths and challenges, and able to offer those gifts to the world in a meaningful way?

Would it mean your child would have the emotional intelligence skills to express and modulate their emotions in a healthy way as well as interacting positively and engaging in fulfilling relationships with those around them?

Would it mean your child would have the resilience and flexibility to cope with challenging and adverse life events that come their way?

Sometimes happiness sounds a lot like the main components of mental health.

It's easy to feel helpless when it comes to our child's mental health and well-being when we look around and feel the weight of scary statistics and trends bearing down on us.

What you may be forgetting amidst the fear-based headlines is that parents have a lot of power when it comes to their child's mental health.

The environment you provide for your child each day holds many opportunities for nourishing good mental health both now and into adulthood.

100 Ways to Nurture Your Child's Mental Health each day

- 1.Love them unconditionally
- 2.Talk about feelings
- 3.Listen first, talk second
- 4.Allow plenty of time for play
- 5.Discipline with respect not shame
- 6.Ask about your child's day
- 7.Let them do things on their own
- 8.Teach good sleep habits
- 9.Model positive self-care
- 10.Let them be independent when possible
- 11.Tell your child what you love about them
- 12.Be honest with them at an age-appropriate level
- 13.Apologize to them when you mess up
- 14.Let them appropriately express their emotions
- 15.Replace yelling and nagging with teaching
- 16.Help them engage in problem-solving
- 17.Make time for daily connection
- 18.Provide a physically safe environment for your child
- 19.Provide an emotionally safe environment for your child
- 20.Provide nutritious whole foods

- 21.Adhere to healthy screen time recommendations
- 22.Validate their feelings
- 23.Grow a rich family culture
- 24.Keep your cool when they heat up
- 25.Let them know mistakes are a chance to learn
- 26.Allow them to experience natural consequences
- 27.Share personal stories to teach important lessons
- 28.Give them specific praise
- 29.Teach them how to journal
- 30.Play family board games
- 31.Allow them to take healthy risks
- 32.Let your child know you are always there if they need to talk
- 33.Surround them with positive role-models
- 34.Teach your child their body belongs to them
- 35.Show them how to take deep breaths
- 36.Remember that kids will act like kids
- 37.Play with your child
- 38.Get to know their friends
- 39.Teach coping strategies
- 40.Set healthy limits
- 41.Believe the best of them
- 42.Have family meetings
- 43.Teach your child to set goals
- 44.Give them downtime
- 45.Move toward them and not away, when they're struggling
- 46.Allow them to have their own ideas and opinions
- 47.Respect your child's boundaries
- 48.Show patience and grace when they mess up
- 49.Encourage them to try a new activity
- 50.Teach them growth mindset
- 51.Be aware of your own emotional triggers
- 52.Establish routines
- 53.Use respectful tones and gestures
- 54.Recognize that behavior is communication
- 55.Create family rituals
- 56.Get to know the person behind 'your kid'
- 57.Take them to therapy
- 58.Explore new things together
- 59.Teach them to respect others by modeling respect to them
- 60.Remember that growing up can be really stressful
- 61.Nurture your child's gifts
- 62.Be on your child's team
- 63.Put down your phone and be in the moment with them
- 64.Teach them plenty of emotions words
- 65.Be intentional about cultivating emotional intelligence
- 66.Remember they want time with you more than new games or toys.
- 67.Be consistent and follow through with what you say
- 68.Share the 'highs' and 'lows' of each day
- 69.Provide an abundance of good physical touch
- 70.Engage in random acts of kindness
- 71.Do mindfulness activities together
- 72.Light up when you see them
- 73.Remind yourself that your child is not you but their own unique person

- 74.Promote creativity
- 75.Encourage regular exercise
- 76.Monitor electronic devices and content
- 77.Remember that discipline means ‘to teach’
- 78.Communicate with your child’s teacher
- 79.Use encouragement over negativity
- 80.Provide opportunities for social interaction
- 81.Tell your child their strengths
- 82.Cuddle with them
- 83.Allow expression through art
- 84.Expect the best from your child
- 85.Teach and model healthy boundaries
- 86.Eat family meals together
- 87.Try time-in’s instead of time-out’s
- 88.Teach and model self-love
- 89.Hug them often
- 90.Healthy living environment
- 91.Pay attention to your child’s interests
- 92.Have uncomfortable conversations
- 93.Welcome do-over’s
- 94.Create a calm down corner
- 95.Read books that normalize emotions
96. Praise effort over achievement
97. Give them household responsibilities
- 98.Do yoga together
- 99.Discover and enjoy mutual hobbies and activities
- 100.Accept your child exactly as they are.

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<https://parentswithconfidence.com/everyday-ways-to-nourish-a-childs-mental-health/>

Parenting Kids Who Sabotage the Holidays

by *Sharla Kostelyk*



The holidays are a special part of the year that most people look forward to, but for some families, the thought brings fear or even dread. For children who have Reactive Attachment

Disorder or have experienced early childhood trauma or for children with ADHD or sensory processing issues, the holidays can be hard. In fact, sometimes children who fall into those categories will sabotage the holidays.

It is not much fun walking around on eggshells knowing that your child is on a hair trigger and may be set off at any second. But holidays are not much fun for those kids either. Big days can be a reminder of all that they have lost or of how their brain works differently than other people’s do or of how far their behaviour is from what they want it to be.

Some of our kids have at times sabotaged big days including birthdays (other people’s and even their own), Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, graduations, anniversaries, family celebrations, vacations, times of accomplishment when others are the center of attention, Father’s Day, and often in particular, Mother’s Day. The root of the sabotaging behaviours is often guilt and shame, but there can be other causes as well. It’s not just adopted kids who sabotage the holidays. There are many reasons a child may do this.

Possible motivations for kids to sabotage the holidays:

1. Feeling unworthy. Abandonment or the perception of abandonment in children who have been adopted or who have had one parent leave the family can lead to a deep sense of shame. This may make them feel as if they are unworthy of love, unworthy of having good things happen to them, unworthy of gifts or attention. With that entrenched feeling of being unworthy of truly feeling happy, sabotaging behaviours can begin to emerge. They may sabotage so that they can force what they see as inevitable disappointment. If their parent then responds in anger to their sabotaging behaviour, it only further validates their belief that they are unlovable.
2. Triggers. During the holidays, triggers are everywhere. Smells, sights, sounds, memories of the past... the holidays can be a minefield to navigate. These triggers can cause a fight, flight or freeze response.
3. Excitement and anxiety feel the same in the body. Read that sentence again. It’s a biggie! Butterflies in the stomach, quickening of breathing rate, a loudly thumping heart, sweating, and trouble sleeping are the same body responses whether you are feeling excited or nervous. When your child feels those body sensations, it can bring memories of times of stress when they felt that way due to anxiety.
4. Lack of routine during the holidays can make certain children feel a lack of control. They may then attempt to assert control and take charge. The unpredictability and uncertainty can feel unsafe to them. With less of a set schedule, they may also be overtired and be eating

- poorly which can also affect behaviour and mood.
5. The holidays often come with sensory overload. This can lead to sensory meltdowns which unintentionally sabotages the holidays
 6. The weight of expectations. When a child believes that he will fall short of the expectations placed on him, he may decide to just quickly blow things up to get it over with. The stress that come with anticipating the disappointment they may cause can be overwhelming.
 7. For children with Reactive Attachment Disorder, Christmas can be a nightmare because during the holiday season, relationships are usually the focus and there is more emphasis put on family togetherness and unity. This feels like a threat to kids who are putting protective walls up when it comes to family relationships.
 8. Unreasonable expectations. Even the most neurotypical, well grounded children tend to have high expectations during the holidays. This is sometimes magnified in kids who have a trauma history or have sensory needs. Some adopted children have a fantasy of what life would be like with their biological parents and nothing in reality can live up to that fantasy.
 9. Grief. Oh my. Consider a simple tradition such as decorating the Christmas tree. Our family's collection of ornaments includes those Baby's First Christmas ornaments and handprint ones I made when many of our kids were newborns. How must that feel for our kids who joined our family when they were 4 and 7? I can buy them ornaments to represent their first years and their milestones, but I cannot replace the hardships of their early years. Holidays have so many things that can magnify grief, sadness and loss.
 10. Protection. Attempting to protect their heart from further disappointment, a child who has experienced early trauma will put walls up and push others away. With everything being magnified during the holidays, those walls have a tendency to go higher and that pushing away can turn to an aggressive shove (literally or figuratively).

Parenting kids who sabotage the holidays:

- Lower your own expectations.
- Provide a lot of opportunity for sensory input.
- Create a calm down kit for your child. We have a specific Christmas Calm Down Kit as well.
- Maintain routines as much as possible.
- Talk candidly with your child ahead of time. Speak factually about past holidays and their challenges with them. Brainstorm strategies with them to help this year go more smoothly.
- Less presents! When it comes to kids who struggle with

the holidays, less is more.

- Simplify. Practise saying “no” to some of the invitations so that you do not over schedule.
- Be willing to let go of things that don't work for your child. You may need to set aside even treasured holiday traditions for a few years.
- Some kids do not do well with surprises. Even though you may think that surprises are fun, they may cause additional stress for your child. If your child falls into this category, resist the urge to surprise them.
- Prepare your child ahead of time what to expect. Tell them where you are going, who will be there, how long you will be staying, what you will be doing there, and what your expectations are of them. Use a calendar to give them as much notice as you can of upcoming events.
- Make a plan with them for where they can go at an event if it becomes too much for them or a signal they can give you that they have reached their limit.
- Talk with your family members and close friends ahead of time and explain why the holidays can be rough for your child and what they can do to minimize the difficulty.
- Manage their expectations. If your child has asked for a gift that is out of budget or not something you want them to have, tell them ahead of time that they won't be receiving it. Speak about how not everything during the holidays go as planned or as wished for. Come up with strategies for managing disappointment.
- Include therapeutic and/or sensory breaks on the big day. Whether it be a birthday, Thanksgiving or Christmas, be willing to pause everything to practise some calm-down techniques.
- Accept that there will be meltdowns (or tantrums or rages), but follow these steps to keep their frequency and intensity as low as possible.
- Talk to your child about which family traditions are hard for them and ways you can make them easier. Gift exchanges are hard for some kids. I let one of my daughters wrap her gifts with me. She then knows what she will be getting, but it takes the anxiety out of it for her and makes Christmas day run more smoothly for everyone.
- Make small promises and then follow through on them in order to maintain trust.
- Talk ahead of time to your child about how excitement and anxiety feel the same in the body and then in the moment, help them distinguish which they are feeling.
- Never equate gifts with behaviour. For children who have experienced trauma, the whole “naughty or nice list” is a disastrous concept. Do not take away or threaten to take away gifts or threaten that “Santa won't come if...” with

children who are trying to just hold it together each day.

- Remember: “They aren’t giving you a hard time. They are having a hard time.”

The good news:

When parenting a child with attachment issues or early childhood trauma, it is important for them to hear “yes”. This does not mean buying them everything on their wish list. In fact, that would not be healthy for them, but the holidays do give you more opportunity to say “yes”.

“Yes, I will sit and do the puzzle with you.”

“Yes, I will be at your Christmas concert. I am so proud to be your mom.”

“Yes, you can have a candy cane.”

“Yes, we can drive around and look at Christmas lights. Let’s bring some hot chocolate!”

“Yes, you can help me make the gravy.”

“Yes, you can help me wrap presents.”

“Yes, you can help me plan the dinner.”

“Yes, you can hang some ornaments.”

“Yes, we can decorate cookies.”

The holidays also allow opportunities for activities to increase eye contact and to promote family togetherness.

No matter how much you prepare and plan, the holidays can still be challenging. To all the parents steeling themselves for the sabotage, grieving the holiday you wish you could have, I see you. You are not alone.

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://www.thechaosandtheclutter.com/archives/parenting-kids-who-sabotage-holidays>

An Attitude of Gratitude in Foster Parenting This Thanksgiving

by *Aimee Lewis*

I know the holidays are just around the corner which means my life, like most of you, gets more hectic. Planning holiday meals, attending multiple family functions in the same day, and getting shopping done on top of the normal everyday stuff that fills our lives can really bog us down. Some days I feel like I am rocking this motherhood thing. Then there are days where I just can’t seem to get ahead and nothing gets done. This year I want to recognize that no matter how hectic life gets, I am thankful for the life I have.

Gratitude Towards the Foster Care System

Thanksgiving typically makes people think about what they are grateful for. The most common responses are usually their jobs, homes, families, good health and the list goes on. Those are great things to be thankful for but as I reflect, I know that I am thankful for the foster system. It’s not glamorous and can

be heartbreaking, but without it, I wouldn’t have our foster baby. I’m thankful every day that I get to wake up and be the one to take care of her and she knows that I am here for her no matter what.

I’m thankful for my spouse who has blossomed in becoming a new dad and is so supportive of me no matter what. I’m thankful for the many people that make it possible for us to have our baby, such as the caseworkers, licensing workers, judges, lawyers and countless others. I am also grateful for her biological mom because without her, the baby wouldn’t be here. I may not agree with the choices being made, but it is not my job to agree or judge.

It is my job to love this baby with all of my being and I am thankful that I get to do that.

As a new mom, I now see how motherhood can be a thankless job. I don’t know about you, but I’ve missed meals, sleep, activities, work, showers or even the chance to brush my hair some days. I see you, mamas, struggling at the grocery store with your kids, crying in your car after dropping your kids at daycare, trying to eat a meal without having a meltdown, talking about your struggles with infertility or talking about how fostering/adoption can be so devastating at times.

I just want to say that you are doing a great job and I thank you for rocking motherhood the best way you know how. Try to remember that the people in your life are thankful for you and all you do even if they may not show it all the time. So as you prepare for all the craziness that comes along with the holiday season, give the people you love a big hug and be thankful of where you are in that moment. Life can change in a heartbeat, so let the people you love know just how thankful you are to be in their lives. Happy Thanksgiving!

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://stlouis.citymomsblog.com/mom/an-attitude-of-gratitude-in-foster-parenting-this-thanksgiving/>

What Adoption Is When You Parent Kids From Hard Places

by *Erin J.*

Adoption is the seed planted in your heart the first time you hear of children without a home. It’s the moment seared into your heart when you saw the face of a child and you knew they were yours.

Adoption is love at first sight, and scared to death. It’s wanting to run away and never say goodbye all at once.

Adoption is coming home with your new child for the first time. Its surreal and amazing. Your world collided with theirs and now you are forever intertwined.

Adoption is the late night researching of attachment disorders, trauma, fetal alcohol syndrome and pouring your

worries out in online support groups so you can have the strength to get up in the morning and try again.

Adoption is having your eyes forever opened to the fact that this world is full of pain, suffering and injustice. This precious child you love so much is now safe, wanted and loved, but you know now there are millions who are not. Their sad faces and hollow eyes haunt you. “Can you find us a family?” will echo in your memory forever because you once thought adoption was like a puzzle with each child fitting into a family. Now you know it’s not true. There are families, but not enough want to take a risk on a wounded child.

Adoption is having the rose colored glasses ripped from your face because you thought adoption was a fairy tale, but instead, you have realized it’s a battlefield. Not everyone can do this. It’s hard. It’s messy. It will require things from you that you could never have imagined.

Adoption is knowing that children are not “lucky.” Losing their first family is not lucky; it’s unimaginable, heart wrenching loss that never, ever goes away. It’s knowing they may call someone else mom, and being OK with it.

Adoption is worrying about your child until 2am, wondering if you’ve tried hard enough, second guessing everything. It’s worrying you aren’t spending enough time worrying about your other kids because you are so worried about the one. It’s wondering if things will ever get better. Will any of us actually be OK?

Adoption is advocating for your child to receive therapies, special education evaluations and medical treatment. It’s sitting stoic and strong in IEP meetings, then crying all the way home. It’s emails and phone calls to advocates and social workers, begging for help. It’s watching time tick away from a child who already started behind the clock. It’s feeling like you are failing, and hating how broken the system is.

Adoption is entering a world so different from the one you lived in before that it’s hard to relate to anyone anymore. People talk about being upset their favorite show got cancelled while you are re-reading a 35 page neuropsychological evaluation through tear filled eyes.

Adoption is feeling misunderstood. People wonder why you are so edgy, defensive and unavailable these days. They don’t see the late nights, the trauma behaviors, the crying every day over school, endless meetings, judgmental teachers and never ending therapies.

Adoption is feeling as if you can never ask for help. After all, you wanted this, and people warned you it would be hard. Admitting that some days it’s just too much would be admitting you’re feeling like a failure — wouldn’t it? Or even worse, would you be admitting you can’t parent this child?

Adoption is joy. It’s the first time your child draws a picture of your family with themselves in it. It’s that first little note that says, “I love you, mom.”

Adoption is finding out who your real friends are and being indescribably grateful for them while being far too busy to

show it.

Adoption is finding a whole new tribe of people to connect with. They may be online, but adoptive moms have your back like no one else in this world. They will fundraise for you, cheer for you, send your kids gifts from states away, call in pizza to your house and give you a safe space to vent without judgement. They get it like no one else and they understand why we all choose to do it again, and again and again.

Adoption will expose the worst parts of you that you never wanted anyone to see. You will be forced to deal with past hurts in your own life so you can help your kids deal with theirs.

Adoption is pain and loss mixed with healing and redemption. It’s the best and the worst of humanity at the same time. It’s wishing a person you may never meet would have had enough support in their life to lovingly parent the child you now call yours.

Adoption is knowing you are not a “special person.” You learn something new every day you wish you had known years ago. You cry, research, cry, advocate, cry, go to therapy, cry, and try, try again tomorrow! You are a mom, and moms do anything for their kids.

Adoption is making it through the adjustment period and coming out on the other side. Maybe years have passed full of days that felt like they’d never end, but you can finally see your child is healing. Hope turns to excitement as the good days begin to outweigh the bad. Eventually a feeling of normalcy is reached, and you remember what it feels like to breathe again.

Adoption is knowing love doesn’t care what color your skin is or if your eyes match. Love opens its doors, its heart and its arms. Love says, “I want you for who you are now and whatever you will become.” Love sees past the behavior and says, “I hear you.” Love sees the worst, but never gives up.

Adoption is love.

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://themighty.com/2017/11/what-adoption-is-when-you-parent-kids-from-hard-places/>

What I’ve Learned Since Becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate

by Michelle Tetschner

Sometimes some of the hardest things we do can create the most joy. I recently signed up and trained to be a court appointed special advocate (CASA) in Maryland. I was very optimistic and very excited to help a youth that is here in Prince George County, Maryland. But the reality is once I got started with this process, it’s been one of the hardest and most rewarding things I’ve ever done.

I was assigned an 8-year-old little boy. This young child has been through a tragic situation. He has lost a piece of his

innocence, he's been taken advantage of by an adult he trusted. Sadly, he was removed from his mother's home.

My foster youth is currently in a wonderful foster care home, and is working hard every day to grow, feel successful and meet life joyfully. I thought my job as a CASA would be very simple, and yet it's been one of the most complex things I've ever dealt with. You work with foster parents who may or may not be trained in the area that best suits this child. They welcomed this child into their home not knowing what trauma the child had experienced. They open their hearts to give this child shelter, protection and a safe home. They don't know how short or long the child will stay with them. Yet, they said "yes."

You also work with a school psychologist, a social worker, a therapist and all of these various team members; coaching them to keep their eye focused on this child, knowing that they as county workers have a huge case load.

I had to have an honest conversation with the foster parents this week that while the child's mother doesn't seem to be involved currently, that it is not their place to judge her but to encourage this child to continue to love his mother unconditionally. The child's mom is working through her own issues. These issues are overwhelming to her. And she is doing the best that she can every. single. day.

From an outsider's view, it's so easy to judge people and the journey that they are on. But we simply can not know the pain and sorrow that they deal with every day. She too is a victim.

But as we work together, we start to see success. We see this child grow and change. We see him become more confident, and secure in this home and his life. Some days success is obvious. His grades may reflect it. His smile and attitude may reflect it.

Some days success is more quiet; when he wants to ask questions and be more open in talking about his past. Moving forward looks different for everyone, but in a child you can see it in their eyes. It shines in the joy and happiness of being young and carefree. We are starting to see that slowly come back.

As I often say, we are all just a little broken. We are like shells on the beach, each with a flaw. No shell is without a flaw, discoloration or crack. Sometimes the flaws are obvious and you can see the chips clearly and at a glance. Other times the flaws may be a tiny chip or a minute crack.

But life is about loving each other in spite of our faults, in spite of our flaws.

Please reach out and be a CASA if at all possible for you. Or be a Foster Parent. It is so rewarding.

But mostly, hug your family.

It makes you appreciate your family, and the quiriness that is unique to each family.

It shows that we are all so different and yet so alike.

Visit casaforchildren.org for more about becoming a CASA if your heart is open.

NFAPA Support Groups

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

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

Contact a Resource Family Consultant for more information:

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

Tammy Welker (Columbus): 402-989-2197

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

Robbi Blume (FACES): 402-853-1091

NFAPA Office: 877-257-0176

IN-PERSON SUPPORT GROUPS

- Scottsbluff Support Group:** Meets the second Tuesday of the month. Registration is required.
 Contact Jolie Camden to register: 308-672-3658
 340 K Street, Gering, NE. Potluck, please bring a dish to share.
 6:00-7:30 p.m.
 November 12 (CANCELLED), December 10, 2019
- Chadron Support Group:** Meets the first Monday of the month. Registration is required.
 Contact Jolie Camden to register: 308-672-3658
 TBA
 6:00-7:30 p.m.
 CANCELLED in November & December.
 Will resume in January 2020.
- North Platte Support Group:** Registration is required.
 Harvest Christian Fellowship, 1501 South Dewey, North Platte, NE
 No childcare provided.
 Contact Terry Robinson to register: 402-460-7296
 Because of the holidays, we will not meet in November or December.
 We will resume in January 2020.
- Columbus Support Group:** Meets the second Tuesday of the month (except June, July and December). Childcare available.
 Contact Tammy Welker at: 402-989-2197
 (Thank you Building Blocks and Behavioral Health Specialists for providing childcare!).
 Peace Lutheran Church, 2720 28th St.
 7:00-8:30 p.m.
 November 12, 2019

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

- FACES:** Online Support Group: Every Tuesday 9:00-10:00 p.m. CT Contact Felicia at Felicia@nfapa.org to become a member of this closed group. Meets weekly to discuss issues foster parents are facing. Support only.

TRANSRACIAL SUPPORT GROUP

- Parenting Across Color Lines:** This group supports and strengthens racial identity in transracial families. Support only. Meets the fourth Monday of the month.
 Children welcome to attend with parents.
 [NEW LOCATION] Connection Point, 1333 North 33rd, Lincoln. 6:15-8:00 pm
 For more information or to RSVP, contact Laurie Miller at Laurie@nfapa.org

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<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/ive-learned-since-becoming-court-213027002.html>

Be sure to mark your calendars! If you have a topic you want discussed, please contact the Resource Family Consultant for that group.

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JOIN NFAPAyour 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): _____

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, \$ _____