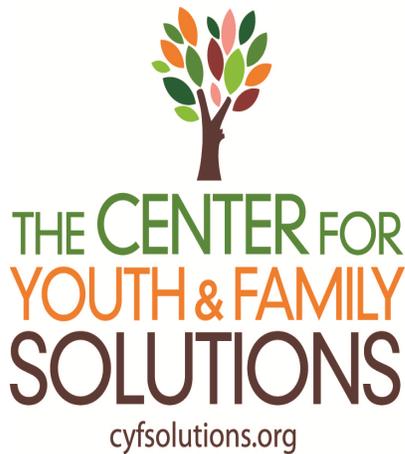


The Foster Caregiver Connection

Connecting Foster Caregivers in Central and Downstate

Holiday Joys, Holiday Stress



We all know holidays can be either boom or bust. Our foster children have had their fill of disappointments, enough to last a lifetime, and here comes another opportunity for one more bust—if we don't help them prepare for these special events.

Making memories is an important role of the foster family—memories of being included, loved, and cherished like every other member of the family. Many foster children will experience the holidays in a new way, with the events and traditions which are already established in the foster home. But what traditions do they bring with them?

Here's our opportunity to discover what is "special" for them—what is essential for their holiday celebration, from foods to music to activities to dress. How wonderful when we can

expand our own celebrations with those from another family through the children in our care, and even better, with the rest of the biological family. How can we include siblings and birth parents, grandparents, or old friends in our gatherings for our foster children, or if it seems too much of a challenge with our own extended families, how else might this look?

If you decorate your home with a Christmas tree, how about making or purchasing a special ornament for the foster child to keep. If two ornaments are set aside, one could be designated for the child, and the other could go to a sibling, birth parent, or other family member.

Candles are used in a lot of events and homes. Candles used symbolically for remembrance could be set aside especially for the foster child's family, whether at home or elsewhere. Even with

young children, this can have meaning—battery-operated for safety, and still out of reach when not in use

Special photos are often taken during the holidays. Include the biological family if at all possible, and be sure to give them copies for their own use.

Special stories or movies, cookies and community or church events—take time for a family discussion as soon as you can, to talk about what's important to each family member this holiday season, and develop ways to include as many ideas and/or customs as possible. Some children may share very little or nothing at all—but you valued them in listening to them, encouraging them to share their experiences and feelings.

Their photos cannot be posted on Facebook...but you can make them a small memory book that will always be theirs. Help them

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Trainings on the Way!



If you are in need of training, please contact your licensing worker in the near future. Relative Caregiver Training for newer relative caregivers and Parenting Skills Training (PST), something which is mandatory for foster homes who care for a child or youth under the specialized contract, are two trainings which will be offered soon in most branch offices.

Relative Caregiver Training is the nuts and bolts of caring for a child from your extended family. Relative caregivers are often grandparents, aunts, uncles, older



siblings, or godparents. The training provides 2 hours of credit and an opportunity to meet with other relative caregivers, developing a circle of support.

Parenting Skills Training (PST) is based on a curriculum originally developed in 1983 by PeoplePlaces.org, in working with children and youth in treatment foster care. The original program was updated and released in 2009, adding current information on child development, how the brain functions and directs behaviors, and the impact of trauma. 27 hours of credit is earned by completing this training.



The Big Family Calendar

Bloomington

November 27; Love and Logic Approach to Parenting; FCAB to follow. RSVP to Lois, 309.820.7616.

January 29, 6 pm to 8 pm; Relative Foster Caregiver's Support Group and Training. RSVP to Lois, 309.820.7616.

February 26, 6-7:30 pm, Dealing with CASA and Court. RSVP to Lois, 309.820.7616.

Champaign

November 1, Foster Caregiver Advisory Board.

December 12, Foster Care Christmas Party, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

Danville

November 14, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm; Foster Care Advisory Board

December 6, Christmas Party, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm

Galesburg

November 9, Meet & Greet Open House, 4 pm to 6 pm.

LsSalle

November 11, National Adoption Month Potluck. Come join other families who have built a family through adoption. For more information, contact Sara at 815.223.4007.

November 15, Foster Parent Support Group, at 5:30 pm. Learn about the role of caseworkers in providing services to foster families and the children they serve.

December 13, Foster Care Christmas Party at the LaSalle County Housing Authority, 2222 N. Tonti St. LaSalle, 6 pm to 8 pm.

Lincoln

December 7, Foster Caregiver Christmas Party, 5 pm to 7 pm, at Carroll Catholic School in Lincoln.

Macomb

November 14, Meet & Greet Open House, 11 am to 2 pm.

Peoria

November 8, Support Group for Specialized Foster Caregivers, from 6 pm to 8 pm. (Usually held 1st Thursday of the month.)

November 13, from 5 pm to 8 pm, Fundraiser at Culver's in Pekin. Proceeds to benefit the Foster Care Program.

November 15, 6 pm to 8 pm, or November 16, 9:30 to 11:30 am; Relative Caregiver Training. For more information or to register, call Allison Housewright at 309.323.6557.

November 20, 6 pm to 8 pm; Peoria Foster Care Advisory Board and Support Group.

December 6, 6 pm to 8 pm, Support Group for Specialized Foster Caregivers.

December 16, 1 pm to 3 pm, Foster Home Christmas Party at Second Chance Church, 3300 W. Willow Knolls. RSVP to Sharon Brooks, 323-6530 by 12/10/2012.

January 3, 6 pm to 8 pm, Support Group for Specialized Foster Caregivers

January 15, 6 pm to 8 pm; Peoria Foster Care Advisory Board and Support Group.

Rock Island

November 24 & 25, Orphan Sunday at Heritage Church of Rock Island; Adoption/Foster Care Recruitment

Springfield

December 8, Foster Family Christmas Party, 3 pm, at the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Church.



Cooking Together with



Homemade gifts can be simple and fast if we have the right ingredients at hand. Pretzel rods dipped in melted white chocolate or milk chocolate, then rolled in sprinkles or crushed nuts is a fun treat for holiday giving—once cooled, bag them and tie with a pretty red bow.

Cocktail peanuts stirred into melted milk chocolate and dropped by spoonfuls on to waxed paper is another easy gift to make and place in a pretty container, also

tied with a pretty bow. Throwing in some miniature marshmallows makes an instant "rocky road".

Crushed peppermint candy canes stirred into melted white chocolate is one more easy-to-make treat that is wonderful holiday fare—spread in an 11" by 14" pan already lightly sprayed with spray cooking oil, cool, and cut into small pieces for bagging. Add one more festive bow and it's ready for giving to family, friends, and teachers, scout leaders and coaches, pastors and caseworkers.



Mary Kay's Corner

This past fall, it has been inspiring to travel around the region and work with so many of our foster parents. As you may recall, CYFS is working toward establishing Foster Caregiver Advisory Boards (FCAB) in each of our local communities. Foster caregivers were invited to participate on these boards to help strengthen and support caregivers in their local community and to strengthen the connection between the CYFS staff and CYFS caregivers. After all, we are all working on the same team.

Well, in just a few short months, the Foster Care Advisory Boards have taken off and are beginning to really make some differences. As a result of these boards, we are working on many projects that will help improve the service we all provide to the children that come into care. Here are just a few things that have happened since the FCAB's have been active:

- Support groups and trainings are now regularly scheduled in several communities where caregivers requested more trainings and more opportunities to network with other caregivers.
- CYFS staff and the Bloomington FCAB are working on putting together a series of brochures to help foster parents understand and navigate the court system.
- Springfield FCAB members have taken it upon themselves to organize the annual Christmas party for foster caregivers and their families.
- Rock Island's FCAB organized an evening out for foster families at a local planetarium.
- LaSalle's FCAB identified the need for more training. As a result, trainings have been offered on topics identified by FCAB such as understanding Healthworks and how to work with the school system.
- Lincoln's FCAB put together a plan to help foster parents better understand the foster care experience by looking at it from different perspectives. What does it look like to a DCP worker or to a biological parent?
- All of the FCAB's worked closely with staff to build the first Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan for the agency.
- Several FCAB's brought foster caregivers and their children together to celebrate Halloween.
- All FCAB's are working on getting a calendar of events set up so that caregivers will have plenty of notice about FCAB and CYFS events for caregivers and children.
- As a result of many relative caregivers asking for more help in raising the kids that have come into their homes, CYFS will be providing additional training through the Relative Caregiver Training. This will help caregivers understand the system, find support from other relative caregivers, and learn more about how CYFS staff can offer assistance.

Our foster parents are a very important part of our child welfare team. Your voice matters! For those of you who have been involved in the boards—many thanks. Your commitment to the children we serve is awesome. To those of you who have not yet participated in the FCAB's—it's not too late! If you would like to participate on a Foster Parent Advisory Board in your community, contact your licensing worker to learn more about upcoming meetings.

Important Phone Numbers

Child Abuse Hotline

800.252.2873

Missing Child Helpline

866.503.0184

Advocacy Office

800.232.3798/217.524.2029

Foster Parent Hotline

800.624.KIDS/800.624.5437

Adoption Hotline

800.572.2390

Inspector General

800.722.9124

Daycare Information

877.746.0829/312.328.2779

Youth Hotline

800.232.3798

- Mary Kay



The Center for Youth and Family Solutions

2610 W. Richwoods Blvd.
Peoria, IL 61604

Branch offices in Bloomington, Champaign, Danville, Galesburg,
LaSalle, Lincoln, Macomb, Rock Island, and Springfield

Phone: 309.323-6600
Website: www.cyfsolutions.org

Branch Offices

Bloomington—Morris	309.820.7616	Lincoln	217.732.3771
Champaign	217.352.5179	Macomb	309.883.1791
Danville	217.443.1772	Peoria	309.323-6600
Galesburg	309.342.1136	Rock Island	309.786.0770
LaSalle	815.223.4007	Springfield	217.528.3694

Achieving Solutions.
Together.



Attitude of Gratitude...

Seems like children in care either don't want to be noticed, and don't feel worthy of receiving praise, gifts, or appreciation, or they expect everything—sun, moon, and stars, with no end to what they "need". All of these children have experienced trauma in the significant loss of their birth family and circle of friends, with behaviors which clearly are driven by early experiences and losses.

What seems to work? We model what we want...we want our children to have a strong sense of self-esteem and confidence in their abilities, so we give them tons of praise. Tons. Which encourages their neurons to connect in new ways, bringing them to the point where they can tolerate and then receive praise without wondering what we "really mean or want"...

For our foster children who "need" so much...we are resolute to be consistent, dependable, and treat all children in our home with fairness and openness. We use true listening to help them feel "heard" and negotiate outcomes whenever possible, something which empowers them in a situation where they have very little power.



Our children in care need to see us express gratitude to others outside the home. This can be simply done—saying "thank you" at the drive-up fast food window, patting a friend on the back, and focus on every amazing thing the children in our home try to do or can do that helps them grow and heal. "Thank you", "good job", "you are working hard", "what a gift you have", and a high five or thumbs up lets our kids know we notice and appreciate their struggles. Shopping for their favorite foods, reading the child's favorite book, playing the child's favorite game provides a strong message of "I care about you, and I want you to feel at home in my family."

Together with our foster children let's give to others...cookies or homemade candles for our neighbors, non-perishable food items to the local food pantry (the need is year-round), homemade cards with notes of love and thanks to those who are most important in our children's lives—for their birth families, their caseworker, their therapist, and their teachers at school. Let them experience how it feels to give, and what can make a lasting difference in our lives.

"If we are to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with the children."

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi