

## Between Families

# *The importance of* **self-care for caregivers**

Many foster parents tend to put the needs of others ahead of their own. They are caregivers by nature. As the leaders of the family, it is easy to become bogged down in the day-to-day responsibilities that come with parenting. When parenting children in foster care who have experienced trauma, the needs can sometimes feel overwhelming.

It is essential that foster parents become skilled at taking care of their own needs and seeking help from others to manage the stressors of parenting to avoid developing compassion fatigue. Signs can include:

- Feeling mentally or physically exhausted most of the time
- Using alcohol, food, caffeine or other substances to fight feelings of being overwhelmed
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling numb and distanced from others or your own life
- Feeling unsatisfied in your work
- Feeling moody, frequently lashing out at children or your partner
- Catching every cold that comes along
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches

Experiencing the above symptoms can make it difficult to provide the intense level of patience, consistency and nurturing needed by children who have experienced trauma. Implementing good self-care can help alleviate symptoms or prevent them from starting.

Develop a written self-care plan to help you stick to it. Set specific times each day, even if just for a few minutes, to do something relaxing or enjoyable for yourself. The activity that works for each person may be different but some examples include: laughing with a good friend, spending some time alone reading for enjoyment, taking a bubble bath or going for a run. Utilizing respite can also be a great way to keep energized and refreshed. Post your plan in a visible place that will remind you to stick to it!

Stay healthy by eating nutritious meals and snacks, getting enough sleep, getting regular exercise, keeping up with medical and dental appointments for yourself and following doctors' recommendations.

Most importantly, remember that you deserve to take a break and take good care of yourself so that you can take good care of the kids!



# Foster family living

Many old conventions that used to define family are now outdated or simply not fitting with today's culture. The reality is that between both parents working and youth staying active in various sports and clubs, families feel lucky to have the rare occasion of spending a few hours together.

Now imagine that reality for youth in foster care. The importance of consistently nurturing the concept of a family bond is amplified for these youth to help them grow a better sense of what family can be like. While no two families are alike, promoting, modeling and engaging youth in family bonding builds their understanding of all the types and ways of positive family togetherness.



Let's first look at the additional complexity this means for youth in foster care. There are a myriad of differences between families: customs, passions, energy levels and so many other things affecting how a family elects to use its bonding times. A foster youth is working hard to figure those out and fit in ... in addition to possibly feeling a divided loyalty between their parents and their foster family. Fear not! There are things you can do to ease this complex but important role you play in a youth's life.

First, make it a standard to always set aside one-on-one time as quickly as possible with a new foster youth in your home to talk about some critical things like:

- Key cultures or customs from their parent's home. How can you incorporate or honor those?
- Who are the important figures in the youth's life?
- Understand their interests and hobbies, and explore ways to engage in them with the youth.
- Explain your family's customs and culture. What do you prize and celebrate? What are the little things (movie night)?
- Develop an understanding of your home's 'golden rules.' What are the few key don't break or always do rules? Examples may be no physical violence, always finish homework prior to dinner, etc. Try to keep this to no more than three.
- Find something new or focused around adding the foster youth into the family. This can be something as small as they get to pick dessert one day a week.

Once these are done, you can focus on engaging and finding the time to make it all work. Time with family doesn't have to be a chore, but it should be a planned commitment. Take steps towards consistency and scheduling to emphasize the importance to the children and yourself. And even though it may feel like 'dragging' the kids into it, they will soon find joy in it.

There are tons of different things to get your family involved in as a bonding experience: arts and crafts, movie nights, playing cards, board games and video games are a few examples. Also, don't forget the timeless family dinner; make it a staple at least a few times a week and include some structured conversations aimed at each person talking about their life, activities and even their hopes or needs. Any activity done as a family is a great way to engage and bond.

## Compliance corner

This time of year brings the start of school for children. At times, it can be tough to shift from the relaxing days of summer to the busyness of the school year. Keep the following in mind to ensure children's safety during this transition.

Make sure there is an approved self-care plan in place before leaving any foster children unattended in the foster home. Children 12 and older can be approved for self-care time when there are no behavioral concerns or risk factors. A child who is 12 years old may be in self-care for a maximum of two consecutive hours and no more than four hours each day. A child who is 14 years of age may be in self-care for no more than four hours each day. A child who is 16 years of age may be in self-care for no more than ten hours each day. Prior to allowing a child to utilize self-care time, you must have a written self-care plan approved by the child placing agency. Occasionally, self-care time is misunderstood to include approval for children to be unsupervised outside of the foster home, i.e. walking to and from school, going to a swimming pool or spending time at the mall. To clarify, the provision for self-care is **only to include unsupervised time in the family foster home**. If you would like to gain permission for any of the aforementioned activities, you must speak with the youth's case manager for approval.

*Between Families is published by TFI Family Services, Inc., a private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is Devoted to the Strength of Family. TFI is licensed as a child placing agency in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas .*

# Outstanding foster care providers

## Kansas care providers of the month Scott & Michel Buster

Scott and Michel Buster have been licensed foster parents since 2007 and have provided care for close to 50 children. They are very open to working with children and their biological families and have maintained relationships even after the children returned home or aged out of the system. They also adopted one of their past foster youth. The couple currently provides care for teen boys as the high school schedule works well with their work schedules. They are licensed for four and try to choose youth who are a good match for one another as well as for their home and family.

Scott has been with his employer for 19 years, commuting to Wichita Monday through Friday despite a medical issue that has resulted in chronic pain in his back, which sets a good example of a positive work ethic for the teens they foster. Michel, a special education teacher, was injured in December which required several medical appointments, including surgery to repair her broken kneecap. She progressed from a wheel chair to a walker and attended physical therapy several times a week, all while maintaining her home and children. The Busters have a great built-in support system with extended family members who also foster and are very supportive of them as foster parents and accepting of the youth in their home. Scott and Michel are very positive and very loving. It's not unusual to hear the words "I love you" directed not only at the biological family members, but at the foster youth as well.



## Oklahoma care providers of the month Josh & Michelle Olson

Josh and Michelle Olson were approved as foster parents on April 15, 2014. One day later, they accepted placement of a sibling group of three young children. With three children of their own, their family quickly grew to eight! Their TFI worker was notified last month that DHS had not been able to locate the biological mother who was currently pregnant. Michelle reached out to the biological mother who then contacted her. The biological mother asked Michelle if she and Josh would take placement of her baby when it was born. She said that she knew how much the Olsons loved and cared for her other three children and she wanted the baby to be in their home. Michelle told her TFI worker that she felt God had been preparing them for this addition to their home. So when DHS contacted the couple about the baby's birth and that it was ready to leave the hospital, TFI completed an overfill request for their home, and the new baby was placed with them on July 20. The Olsons are committed to the foster children in their home and love them as their own. They are doing very well and love being a family of nine!



# Recruitment moment

TFI believes strongly in a customer service model for family retention and support. The best way to recruit new foster parents is to take care of the ones we have.

Our customer service model for TFI is built on a belief that each foster parent in the child welfare system must feel like a valued member of the team and take to heart the act of providing good care to our children.

The needs of foster parents and our TFI foster care staff are quite similar. Both desire to:

- Feel respected and valued
- Be considered significant contributors to the challenging work of child welfare
- Receive supports needed to fulfill responsibilities for their role
- Experience opportunities for growth
- Receive timely responses to their needs

TFI wants to offer the best care to our foster parents by providing a number of services including a

foster care worker available 24/7, monthly support meetings for our families, quick and responsive calls back to our families, a yearly retreat for training and encouragement and much more. One of the things TFI is most proud of is our foster parent referral system. This is the second largest recruitment method for TFI over the last two years. We firmly believe if we take care of our families, they will in turn take care of our kids and help recruit new families.

TFI continues to be a leader in foster parent initiatives and we are continuing our \$500 foster parent referral bonus this next fiscal year. How easy is it? Simply refer a new family to TFI by having them call our recruitment line at 800-279-9914 (Kansas) or 866-543-9810 (Oklahoma) and request a packet of information — be sure they tell us you referred them. Once the family becomes certified we will issue you a \$500 referral incentive. Just another way TFI says, “Thank you for all you do!”

## Oklahoma news

TFI Family Connections celebrated its two year anniversary with the OKDHS Bridge Foster Care contract on August 5. We have seen significant growth in our foster care program during this time thanks to each of you! Our first home was approved in November 2013, and there are now 170 homes open with TFI and 291 children in placement. We are so thankful for each one of you for taking our foster children into your homes!

As we have grown in number of homes, we have seen similar growth in our employee base. We started with one foster care worker, and today have 14 workers with openings for one in each of the following areas: Lawton, Enid, Broken Arrow and Oklahoma City. We are also hiring additional recruiters. (If you know of anyone looking for a job, please send them our way!)

I want to take a moment to thank you. Thank you for being willing to take calls from our intake department in the middle of the night and take a child to keep them out of the shelter. Thank you for being willing to consider a teenager. Thank you for buying another bed to enable you to take a sibling set. Thank you for the amazing work you do in caring for and loving the children in your care. Helping children to heal from trauma is a challenging task. Thank you for not giving up on them, even when it is so very hard to keep going. Thank you for supporting each other through those hard times. Thank you.

If there is anything you need to help you care for our children, please let us know. If there is anything you need for us to better support you, please let us know.

## Happy anniversary

### 10 years

Jason & Crystal Owen

Jason & Tiffany Wiske

### 5 years

Scott & Michel Buster  
Marvin & Debra Moore

Yolanda White

### 1 year

Joseph & Kimberly Brown  
Florence Dordor  
Steven & Sheila Fagan  
Clark & Amber Hadley  
Lance & Kimberly Jones  
Jessica King & Sara Wilson  
Wayne & Sara Koch  
Darron & Adonna McCord

Laura Motto  
Alvina Ostrander  
Keith & Paula Peuker  
Jeffrey & Stephanie Robinson  
Steven & Veva Ruggles  
Gaylon & Cynthia Scroggins  
Carol Yauch



217 SE 4th St  
Topeka, KS 66603  
800-279-9914 | [tfifamilyservices.org](http://tfifamilyservices.org)

For the most current calendar for Kansas Children Alliance Training, go to [childally.org/training.html](http://childally.org/training.html)

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After hour emergencies, please call 877-921-4114.

# FOSTER FOSTER FOSTER

*hope* *love* *care*

## **Requesting your feedback**

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is starting a scheduled, routine review of TFI Family Services, Inc. and its subsidiary companies: TFI Family Connections, Pathway Family Services and Texas Family Initiative. COA is a national organization that sets standards for quality services and sends teams of professionals to visit companies to see if they are complying with those standards.

Over the next few months, TFI will submit information about its programs and services to COA for review. Then in early January 2016, COA representatives will be on-site visiting TFI offices and speaking with staff, clients, foster parents and other important members of

TFI's community. The results of the review process will be compiled and made available in mid-2016.

There is one other very important step in the COA review process, and to accomplish this step we need your help. Because of your familiarity with TFI, you will receive an email or letter in early September requesting your participation in a COA survey. This survey is COA's way of collecting candid, confidential feedback from those who know TFI best, including clients, foster parents, staff, board members, community partners, etc.

You may participate in the survey process by telephone or online. Specific details about the phone number and web address to use will be noted in

the correspondence. Please know that your feedback to COA is confidential. Neither COA nor TFI will know the individual identities of those who respond to the survey. TFI will receive a summary of the feedback after the site visit in January.

TFI is proud of the services we provide and of our foster parents, staff members, board members and community partners! We strongly encourage you to participate in the survey process. Your feedback will be used to further improve the care we provide to children and families.

Thank you in advance for taking time to respond to the survey. Your participation is a very important part of the accreditation process, and we value your feedback!