

Between Families

Celebrating

THANKSGIVING

with foster children

For many of us, memories of Thanksgiving involve spending time with family, eating a big dinner, watching football and taking a walk after dinner. Our foster children may have some of the same memories, but they could also be painful. Thanksgiving can be very overwhelming and difficult for foster children. Use the following tips to help your foster children have a great holiday.

1. Discuss the meaning. Talk about the purpose and history behind the holiday. Celebrate how people from two different cultures came together to rejoice and be thankful.

2. Prepare the child. Celebrations often involve a lot of people and food, as well as

expectations about using good manners. Explain what your family will do to celebrate, who will be there, what will happen, what foods you will have, that there will be plenty for everyone and what your expectations are for manners. Most foster children have food issues. Since food is a huge part of Thanksgiving, be reassuring to your foster children and have a plan to address their needs. Provide special left-over containers labeled with the foster child's name. Have rules in place ahead of time (for example, if you want dessert, you must first eat a veggie). Don't force the child to eat everything on their plate; respect their feeling of being full.



3. Prepare your family and guests. If this is the child's first Thanksgiving in your home, let your family know while ensuring confidentiality. For instance, do not discuss the reasons the child is not with their parents. This can cause more harm than good. While your family should help the child feel welcome, confirm they will not make the child feel obligated to have close contact, such as giving or receiving hugs. Hugs can seem friendly and harmless, but a child who has been abused physically or sexually may see them as a threat. If he shows discomfort with physical contact, it is important not to force it. However, if your foster child doesn't mind a hug, it's great for them to show and receive affection this way.

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Celebrating Thanksgiving with foster children *(continued)*

4. Include the child's special foods. Find out what your foster children's favorite foods are for Thanksgiving. It may be something untraditional or conventional. Ask if there is something they want to have, and find a way to include that food.

5. Give thanks. Remember to give thanks for the child being with you and celebrating in your home. So often, foster kids don't believe they belong or are welcome. Take the opportunity to say good things about them, and let everyone know you are thankful for them.

6. Respect feelings. As you have your family around, remember the child's estranged family is still their family, and they are not with them. Foster kids long for their parents regardless of the abuse. Frequently, children will feel sad as they miss their parents or siblings. They may feel

sad for being away or guilty for celebrating while their parents are not. They may be wondering if their parents are ok or why their family can't be like yours. Be ready to have a conversation if the child wants to talk about their holidays. Follow the child's lead, and be prepared to share your empathy for the things the child did not have with their parents. Don't ignore the sadness, because then the child is alone. Feel honored that the child wants to share their life with you.

7. Discipline. When the child acts out, don't threaten taking away Thanksgiving or making a child miss it. Taking things or events away from children who have so little, but yet so much trauma, is going to backfire. Their behavior will worsen, or they may withdraw. Be creative in your parenting to handle the behaviors: engage the child in helping decorate, clean, cook, etc. Remember to engage and not isolate the child.



Facilitating timely school enrollment

Enrolling foster children in school can be a challenge. From getting records, to knowing what documentation the school will ask for when you take a child to enroll, this task can seem daunting. If you take placement of a child who is changing schools, even within the same school district, it is vital you know the school name and district where the child most recently attended school. This is a good question to ask when admissions calls you. The information is typically listed on the paperwork the contractors send when searching for placement.



Outstanding foster care providers

Kansas care providers of the month Dan & Misty Richters

Dan and Misty Richters' commitment to the children in their home is insurmountable to none. In 10 years of providing foster care, the couple has opened their hearts and home to 19 children. The Richters are well aware that time in placement is essential to foster children to help them obtain a sense of security and belonging in order to provide a solid foundation to help children heal.

The Richters household with seven children is best described as busy! They transport the children to four different schools, accompany the children to all mental health and medical appointments, attend conferences at school and meet with numerous community service providers, as well as contracting and non-contracting staff. These foster parents facilitate visits and welcome birth family members into their home. They do an excellent job of maintaining open communication and providing necessary paperwork.

This couple makes a point to show no partiality regarding their birth children, adopted children or foster children. Throughout the summer the family has gone on vacation and camping trips with all the children. For some of the foster children in their family, this was their first experience of camping and first trip outside of Kansas!

The Richters show absolute caring and compassion for children and willingly volunteered at a moment's notice to provide emergency respite when needed. As experienced foster parents, they provide support for other foster families in our foster family network. They have been excellent foster parents to work with and are a true blessing for the children in their care.



Oklahoma care providers of the month Jason & Angie Christman

Jason and Angie Christman have a sibling set of two teenagers. Since the children were placed in the home in July, the family has taken the children to their home town (two hour drive each way) on two different occasions to keep them connected with their friends and family. During the most recent visit, the family stayed at a hotel and invited the children's family and friends over for a pizza party. While the children have been placed in the home, one of the children has experienced suicidal ideation and has run away from the home. Despite these difficulties and added stress on the family, the Christmans are adamant about maintaining placement. They understand the importance of truly being there for a child in times such as these – when the child needs them more than ever.



Oklahoma news

Employee of the quarter

TFI is excited to recognize Shenelle Flowers as our newest employee of the quarter.

New staff & promotions

- Karla Ryan-Holmes has been promoted to supervisor over Oklahoma City and surrounding area.
- Welcome the following new foster care workers: Heather Hughes (Lawton), Cari Montgomery (Lawton),

Angelica Clayton (Norman), Jennifer Diener (Enid), Kristen Ford (Lawton) and Rebekah Clark-Hook (Seminole).

- Welcome new recruiter Jason McGrewe.

New office

Please come by our new Tulsa office and see our expanded space. We are now located at **2532-A East 71st St. Tulsa, OK 74136.**

TFI sponsoring a rising star

TFI is partnering with Jake Gill and the Jake Gill Band to raise awareness of the need for foster parents. Gill will host 70 to 80 shows over the next year in Oklahoma and Kansas, where he will talk about the crisis of foster care and the urgent need for more foster parents. TFI will join Gill at special foster care awareness nights, and TFI material will be

distributed from his merchandise tent after each performance.

Gill is an up and coming rock 'n' roll country musician. He won a song writing contest, allowing him to open for Jason Aldean at the Country Stampede in Manhattan, Kansas. Check him out at jakegill.net and visit his **Facebook** page and give him a "like."

Happy anniversary

15 years

Everett & Debbie Carrell

10 years

Shawnda Becannon

Jonathan & Donna Schommer

5 years

Charles & Mary Carter
Brent & Melissa Hutton
Frederick & Marcia John

Debra Ratner
Jonathan & Darla Wright

1 year

Blake & Nicole Barnhouse
Peter & Lori Brackett
Brandon & Natalie Claflin
David & Lacy Cruz
Stephen & Kristi Ditmer
Jason & Polly Engel
George & Scarlet Graves
Gary & Lydia Greer
Timothy & Deanna Healy

Charles & Michelle Heaton
Amber Helmuth
Mark Kersey & Chelsea Bunch
Robert & Cheryl McNish
Paul & Tabitha Moura
Brandon & Cassandra Raleigh
Anne Scalet & Dawn Quinton
Lawrence & Pamela Washington
Kimberly Young

Recruitment moment

Who says recruitment can't be fun? The Nexus Church Glam Squad partnered with TFI last month to host a Girls Night Out event for teens in foster care. The girls had their hair and make-up done professionally and participated in a photo shoot and fancy dinner afterwards. Not only did the girls enjoy this night of pampering, but they were also able to meet new friends and learn about the salon business.

We are always looking for ways to get involved in the community and spread the word about the need for foster families. Please contact us if you have any fun ideas or would like someone to come speak about foster care to your church or small group. Sometimes people are not ready or able to become foster parents, but that doesn't mean they can't be involved. If you would like to partner with TFI, contact Ali Ardery at aardery@tfifamily.org or 913-375-4888 to learn how you can help.





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800-279-9914 | tfifamilyservices.org

For the most current calendar for Kansas Children Alliance Training, go to childdally.org/training.html

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

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