

# Wright County Human Services Child Foster Care

December 2010

Wright County Human Services, 1004 Commercial Dr, Buffalo, MN 55313 - 763-682-7400  
<http://www.co.wright.mn.us/department/humanservices/childfoster.asp>

## Self-Care

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Taking care of yourself is critical during the holiday season. This time of year is always busy with the hustle and bustle of shopping and parties. However, this can also be a very emotional time for the foster children in our care. Heightened stress levels can evoke more sudden and significant behavioral responses in all of us. Therefore, it is especially important to take care of yourselves. Below are two helpful articles about stress relief and self-care.

### *Preventing Foster Care Burnout*

“Foster Care Burnout” is a term used to describe the physical and emotional behaviors and attitudes that indicate a foster parent has become worn out and has exhausted his or her energy. It is brought on by attempting to meet many demands over a period of time, without relief. Some of the stresses of foster care that contribute to burnout include: isolation from others, much heartbreak with little appreciation, lack of understanding from society, little control over the rules or situations you must operate under, caring for too many children, caring for children with demanding needs, having to deal with so many people with different personalities, and frustration working with a large bureaucracy.

Physical indicators of burnout include exhaustion, chronic tiredness, a lingering cold, headaches, and sleep troubles. Emotional indicators include loss of enthusiasm, a feeling that you have nothing left to give, feeling trapped, depressed and quick to anger. Behavioral symptoms include difficulty asking for help, resisting change of any kind, increased alcohol use and irritability.

### Here are some ways to help prevent burnout...

- Know your limits, skills, strength and weaknesses
- Participate in a support group
- Ask for help when you need it
- Increase your knowledge and skills by attending foster parenting classes
- Use respite care and take breaks
- Take time for yourself and your family relationships
- Spend time with people who are happy, healthy, and free of major problems
- Think positively, focusing on the good things that have happened during the day, rather than on the negative
- Appreciate the small gains made with foster children

The key to preventing burnout is to keep a balance in your life.

*Article by Beth Duffy. Taken from the Hennepin County Foster Parent Resource Book (2005)*

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***“Fostering is the  
hardest job you’ll ever  
love.”***

*~ Unknown*

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## Stress

Foster parents may experience stress, sometimes called “burnout”, by attempting to meet the many demands of special needs children over a period of time without relief.

Some signs of stress may be:

- Exhaustion
- Headaches
- Sleeping trouble
- Depression
- A quickness to anger
- Resisting change
- Irritability
- Increased alcohol use
- Becoming lax with paperwork or in supervision of children

Some ways to prevent stress are to:

- Know your limits, skills, strengths, and weaknesses
- Ask for help when you need it
- Increase your knowledge and skills by attending foster parent training classes
- Use respite regularly and take breaks for yourself
- Take time for yourself and your family
- Spend time with people who are happy
- Focus on good things rather than negative
- Appreciate the small gains made with foster children

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***“The time to relax is  
when you don’t have  
time for it.”***

*~Attributed to both Jim  
Goodwin and Sydney J. Harris*

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The key to preventing burnout is to keep a balance in your life. If you are experiencing stress that is negatively affecting your ability to care for yourself, your family, and/or the foster child, talk about this with your licensing social worker.

*Information Courtesy of The Hennepin County Foster Parent Guide A - Z. P.64. (2010).*

## Placement Considerations / Matching

When children leave their families and move into a foster home, this is a time of significant stress and turmoil for children. It is our role to support these children and offer them the best care possible until they can safely return home. This is why Wright County Human Services takes the task of “matching” so seriously.

Matching is a key component of successful placements for children in foster care. When a child needs to move into a foster home, many variables are considered before contacting a particular foster home. Social workers assess the child’s current situation and prioritize what needs of the child are most critical. First and foremost, we will match a child with a foster home that is able to meet the child’s emotional and behavioral needs. Often we have more than one foster home that could successfully care for the child. Next, we consider additional variables that may be important for the child. For example, if the child’s school support is very strong and this is an important factor for the child’s success, we may attempt to find a home in that child’s current school district. We also consider how the child’s needs could impact each foster home and other children already placed in the home. For example, we would not place a physically or sexually aggressive child in a home where there are younger children or potentially vulnerable individuals. Other aspects frequently considered include: previous placement history, transportation needs (school, appointments, visitation, etc), cultural issues, personality traits/characteristics, and foster parent’s parenting style. Because each child has different needs, the matching criteria must be individualized and discussed on a case by case basis. So as we say, “It is all about the match.”

## Independent Living Skills

Public Law 110-351 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (MN Statute 260C.451 Subd.1) changed Minnesota law to allow children in foster care to remain in care until age 21. A significant reason for this legislative change was to ensure foster youth are leaving care with the skills necessary to successfully live independently. Homes caring for youth ages 16 and older are expected to be actively involved in planning for this transition. Foster parents can play a vital role in helping youth identify their strengths and acquire skills so they can envision a future filled with promise. The creation of an independent living plan should be guided by the young adult with support from his or her support team. The annual court review hearing for youth ages 16 and older now includes a review of 12 specific transition goals.

Transition Goal	How You Can Help
Have a permanent connection to a caring adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify someone important in the youth's life</li> <li>Find creative ways to support this relationship</li> </ul>
Complete drivers education or demonstrate ability to use public transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the youth's legal guardian has given permission, help the youth sign up for driver's education courses</li> <li>Create a transportation plan to get to job site or college classes (if applicable)</li> </ul>
Obtain a high school diploma or equivalent level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrate achievements</li> <li>Attend school conferences</li> <li>Discuss academic needs with youth</li> <li>Monitor progress</li> </ul>
Have a job and/or be enrolled in post-secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proof-read job and school applications</li> <li>Role-play interview etiquette</li> <li>Discuss career interests and college planning</li> <li>Attend college fairs and tour programs together</li> </ul>
Apply for post-secondary financial aid if eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist youth in completion of FAFSA financial aid documents</li> <li>Assist youth in application for educational scholarships</li> </ul>
Apply for disability income assistance if eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If youth has disabilities that prevent employment, ask the child's social worker if it makes sense to apply for disability benefits</li> </ul>
Maintain health care coverage and relationships with health care providers for physical and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have youth begin scheduling and keeping their own appointments</li> <li>Help youth learn how to apply for and maintain Medical Assistance insurance coverage</li> </ul>
Obtain affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss possible housing options                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renting a room from a stable friend or family member</li> <li>Obtain low-income housing list and help youth make initial inquiry phone calls / get on waiting lists</li> <li>Dorm room if attending college</li> </ul> </li> <li>Tour possible housing options together</li> </ul>
Save sufficient funds to pay for one month's rent and a damage deposit.  In Wright County, average rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$850. Often a damage deposit + first and last months rent is also required.  Subsidized housing also available to those who qualify. Rent is usually 30% of your income.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help youth create a realistic monthly budget to afford to live on their own</li> <li>Help youth to open checking and savings accounts</li> <li>Teach youth how to write checks, balance accounts, utilize on-line banking, etc.</li> <li>Help youth collect furnishings and supplies needed for housing</li> </ul>
Creation of a back up plan should the original housing plan be unworkable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist youth with creation of multiple fall back options</li> </ul>
If male, register for Selective Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth may register online: <a href="http://www.sss.gov/">http://www.sss.gov/</a></li> </ul>
Obtain copies of essential documents: Social Security Card Birth Certificate Driver's License or State ID School, Medical, Dental Records Contact Lists for Important Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request these documents from the child's social worker and store them in a secure location</li> </ul>

In addition to these 12 goals identified by statute, foster parents can also assist youth in preparing for independent living through other creative means such as allowing them to help plan and cook family meals and by learning to do their own laundry. It is important to teach young adults that it is alright not to have all the answers. Help them learn how to access information as they work to accomplish their goals.

## Rule & Statute Reminders

### Your Rights In Juvenile Court

Article by Becky Richardson

As a foster parent you care about the children in your home and you may want to have a voice in what happens to them. The major decisions about foster children are made in juvenile court. You may attend court if you want input into decisions about your foster children. Of course, you should **always** share your thoughts and information with child protection workers, child services workers, adoption social workers, and guardians ad litem, but going to court gives you access to the decision **making** process,

Foster parents have the right to be notified of juvenile court hearings regarding the foster children placed in your home. You should receive a letter from the juvenile court telling you when and where the hearing will be held, This is NOT a subpoena, which is a demand that you come to court. This notice just invites you to attend the court hearing, if you wish,

A second right you have is to be present, for the court hearing, unless you are excluded by the judge,

You also have the right to offer information if the judge asks for it. In other words, no one can prevent you from sharing information if the judge <sup>asks</sup> asks for it. If you do attend a hearing, you have a fourth right to be heard if you wish to say something. In case the judge doesn't ask for your opinion, you still have the right to be heard. You may need to request to speak. Sometimes the judge will ask you if you have anything to say. Sometimes you will need to let the judge know you want to speak. You can do this by telling the county attorney before the hearing that you want to talk or you can hold up your hand and be recognized by the judge.

*Article adapted from the Foster Parent Resource Book, Hennepin County (2005)*

#### ***Should you attend juvenile court?***

There are several advantages;

- You can find out exactly what is going on with the family and child
- You can tell the judge what you think is best for the child
- You can know that your opinion has been heard

Your input to the court provides valuable information whether you agree or disagree with the department's plan for the child.

The disadvantages of attending court are:

- If you have negative things to say about the parents who are in the courtroom, it may damage your relationship with them
- There is no guarantee that your opinion will make any difference in the decision of the judge
- You may find out more than you want to know
- There are often hours of waiting in the lobby for a few minutes in court

#### ***What happens at a court hearing?***

- Let the social worker know that you are coming to court. Hearings sometimes get cancelled; you won't be notified if no one knows you are coming. It is also good practice to talk to the social worker about what you want to say in court.
- There is no announcement that the hearing is starting, so stay close to the social worker and be alert to when participants go into the courtroom.
- Once you are in the courtroom, take a seat in the back. You may be asked to identify yourself at the beginning of the hearing. If you want to say something, be sure the judge knows.

Attending court hearings is an important way to advocate for the children in your care. It is a good investment of your time and energy to be sure the court has all the information to make the best decisions for the children.

## Website Quiz

Completion of this quiz will count for one hour of training!

### Wright County Human Services Child Foster Care Website

<http://www.co.wright.mn.us/department/humanservices/childfoster.asp>

By accessing the website, please answer the following questions:

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1. What is concurrent planning?

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2. What MN laws govern Child Foster Care?

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3. What is a National Network for Young People in Foster Care?

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4. Who should you contact to check out Foster Parent College DVDs from Wright County Human Services?

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5. Where can you find fact sheets about specific mental health disorders?

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6. Where can you find Wright County training and support group information?

***Return to either Jill or Kris***

*Wishing you a healthy, happy, and safe  
Holiday Season!*

*Warmest wishes from,*

*KinCarton*

*Janet*

*Jill Marz*

*Marian Elbert*

*Tom*