

# fostering perspectives

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## Supporting successful transitions (for everyone!)

Have you heard the expression, "The only constant in life is change?" This phrase resonates with most people, but for children and youth in foster care it rings especially true.

For most kids, placement in care brings waves of change that can affect every dimension of their lives: their clothes and toys. How things smell. Where and with whom they live. When and what they eat. Where they go to school.

If they're in care long, many also face placement changes on top of the typical developmental changes that are part of everyone's

growing up: losing (and gaining) teeth. Getting taller. Puberty.

Resource parents aren't strangers to change, either. They're there with the children as every new change comes rolling in, doing their utmost to buffer and comfort them and teach them the skills they need to navigate life's transitions.

To support resource parents—and the children and youth they care so much about—this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* offers information, resources, and lessons learned about coping with and mastering transitions.

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Donna Foster

## How will I remember my life when moving from one home to another?

by Donna Foster

If I were to ask you to tell me about your life, where would you start?

Would it be the time you broke your arm in a car accident when you were 17? Or the time your family moved, leaving your grandparents and friends behind? You were only eight years old then and you felt so unhappy and alone. Maybe you would cry telling me how one of your brothers died from an illness and your family lost their meaning in life. You may have many difficult and painful memories that bring you sadness.

Or would you talk about your dad smiling and clapping when you sang in school chorus? Or about making a new best friend when you moved to a new neighborhood? How many fun and silly stories do you have about playing with your sister and brothers? Or how you felt everything was OK in the world when you cuddled in your mother's lap. Her arms always made you feel safe.

We need good, warm stories to balance the difficult times in our lives. And when we forget, we need those who were there to remind us of them.

Children in foster care have their stories. Which ones do you think stand out for them about entering foster care? Probably the painful memories come to mind. Going into foster care is traumatic.

So how do you help them recall their good, warm, loving memories? Even in chaos there are happy moments worth holding on to. How do you help the child keep those moments close by when times are hard?

By keeping them safe in a **life book**.

### A Child's Life Book

A child's life book holds their stories, memories, hopes, and dreams. It holds the happy and the sad because it is their truth—their life. The people to help document these things are his foster parents, his social worker, and his birth parents. To make the life book richer, the other important people in his life can share memories with him. Stories and photos from siblings, grandparents, teachers, and others can prove to the child he is special to many people.

A life book is essential in helping a child who has experienced trauma. And all children in foster care have experienced trauma.

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If you fill up one book, you continue with another. One of the children I fostered left us with three life books and huge plastic containers full of his special belongings,

including items he brought from his birth home.

### More than a Photo Album

A life book is more than a photo album. A life book is a binder filled with preprinted pages to fill out or pages children can design themselves. It holds a child's memories: mementos, photos, drawings, journals. Every photo should have a written story to describe who was there, where it was taken, when it was taken and any special memories or feelings tied to it. The child uses his life book to record his history and the goals for his future.

The life book is a tool that helps the child to process all the big events *continued next page*

# How will I remember my life?

continued from previous page

throughout his lifetime. It may begin when the child moved into his foster home, but the story it tells should start with his birth. Creating it should be an ongoing process.

The life book belongs to the child. He decides who can look at it. When the child moves, the book goes with him.

## Connection to Shared Parenting

Take advantage of all the opportunities to create the child's life book. Visits can be made richer with the sharing of stories and photos. Foster parents can give to birth parents copies of photos taken of their child so they can share in his milestones. This encourages the birth parents and the child.

Another benefit is that life books can help create a healthy relationship between birth parents and foster parents. Just imagine how the child feels when he is sitting between his birth and foster parents as they help create pages together. The foster parent or the social worker can bring the accessories to make life book pages.

In the past when I shared photos with the birth parent, the birth parent or grandparents brought photos of when the child was home. I copied them to use in the life book and gave the originals back to the family. Seeing their family photos and stories in the child's life book proved to the birth family that the foster family was including them in their child's life. Life books can be a wonderful tool to support shared parenting.

## Life Books Ease Transitions

Are you seeing the big picture? We need to think "outside the box" and be creative in meeting children's needs. One of the foster parents' jobs is helping children transition into and out of foster care. Life books can show the child they don't have to lose their past in order to gain their future.

What better way to help the child than to record their journey in a life book? Children benefit tremendously when they can open up a book and view their life and those who love them. Really, we all could benefit from having our own life book.

Another benefit for the foster family when working on the child's life book with the birth parent is the birth parent will feel the foster parent's support. If birth parents are convinced of this, when the child goes home, the foster family could remain part of the child's life.

Don't forget to include your life with the child in the book so he will have his memories with you. When the child is preparing to leave, a letter from the foster family expressing their ongoing love for the child and his family makes the move home easier. A group photo

with both families speaks volumes!

Reunification is usually the plan, but if something changes and the child is freed for adoption, can you see the gem in having a life book? It answers the child's questions of "who am I?" and "was I loved?" Plus, adoptive parents can continue the child's journey with their own life book stories and photos. If he is not adopted by his foster parents, it would lessen the trauma of leaving his foster home if his foster family is encouraged to remain in the child's life. The

Life books can be wonderful tool to support shared parenting.

overlapping of families feels more like a continuum of life instead of a loss of meaningful relationships. This is how children need us to love them.

Want to be remembered as someone who cares deeply for the child?

Create a life book with the child that shows your commitment to his well-being.

Enjoy the process!

Donna Foster is the author of "Shelby and Me: Our Journey through Life Books," a national trainer, and a consultant who lives in Marshville, NC.

## Supplies for Creating Life Books

Put scrapbooking supplies on your agency's "wish list" so the community can donate or create a project for life books. Many items below can be found in craft, department, dollar, and office supply stores.

- **Binders:** Use one with a clear sleeve you can slide a title page into. A 3-inch binder holds a lot of pages. If a binder becomes full, buy another. The binder color should reflect the child's taste. Binders that hold 8½" x 11" paper are easiest to find and use.
- **Scrapbooks:** A popular size is 12" x 12". If you select this size, use 12" x 12" paper.
- **Colored paper and card stock** (acid-free, lignin-free): Use any scraps left over to add dimension to scrapbook pages.
- **White paper and card stock** (acid-free, lignin-free): Can be used for general pages or to share stories to place on darker pages.
- **Pens, markers, pencils** (acid-free): Needed to write stories, notes, and captions around photos. Acid-free is a must so the ink does not fade. Black is a staple (sets with .25mm-.45mm are helpful for a change in print size). Colored pens are good for writing and drawing.
- **Lettering** (acid-free, lignin-free): An old stand-by that come in all color and sizes. Children like to have their names on their pages.
- **Stamps/stamp pads:** Stamping is fun. The proper acid-free ink is mostly found in craft stores and some department stores. When stamping, you can go further by coloring in the ink design with special pens, etc.
- **Stickers** (acid-free, lignin-free): Available for all occasions and themes, stickers are fun to use and can dress up any life book page.
- **Die-cuts** (acid-free, lignin-free): Stick these card stock shapes (squares, ovals, etc.) to your pages. You can buy them separately or buy a large tool that cuts different shapes.
- **Paper trimmer:** Trimmers cut your paper in a straight line and are easy to use.
- **Sharp scissors:** Worth the cost. You will be cutting small angles and other scrapbooking items.
- **Adhesives** (acid-free): There are several types of glues (liquid, non-wrinkling, acid-free, glue sticks, glue pens, glue paste) as well as double-sided tape (squares, dots, cut-as-you-go).
- **Corner punch:** Curves photo corners. Very handy.
- **Ultra ShapeXpress Starter Set by Fiskars:** Cuts shapes and borders quickly and easily.
- **Life keepsake boxes:** Not all keepsakes can be stored in a binder. Having plastic containers to store larger or extra items gives more options for storing. Just a reminder, children who have experienced losses may either collect and save everything or not keep anything for fear the items will be taken from them. Giving the child control over their possessions is vital. It is OK for adults to store away things they feel the child will miss in his later years.

## Lifebooks: Samples and Sources

Here are just a few of the resources available to help you create a lifebook.

**The Child's Own Story: Life Story Work with Traumatized Children** by Richard Rose and Terry Philpot (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005). Available from: [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com).

**Making History: A Social Worker's Guide to Lifebooks** by Joann Harrison, Elaine Campbell, Penny Chumbley (2010). Available from: <http://1.usa.gov/XUfB11>.

**Lifebook Pages from the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association.** Available from: [www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa\\_lifebook\\_pages.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa_lifebook_pages.asp).

**My Foster Care Journey** by Beth O'Malley (2001). Available from: [www.adoptionlifebooks.com](http://www.adoptionlifebooks.com)

**My Awesome Life** by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Available from: <http://www.lssi.org/SUP-PORT/MyAwesomeLife.aspx>.

**Shelby and Me: Our Journey through Life Books**, by Donna Foster. Available by emailing [DonnaFoster@shelbyandme.com](mailto:DonnaFoster@shelbyandme.com).



# How to make initial placements easier by Rochelle Johnson

The initial placement of a child in our home is often an exciting time. For many of us, it is the first introduction to a young person that will be living with us for days, months, or sometimes years. In a perfect world, the logistics of welcoming that child into our family would be clearly presented and carefully organized so we could focus on the important goal of making the child's transition as easy and smooth as possible.

However, we don't live in a perfect world. Initial placements can be rocky, hurried, and filled with informational gaps about a child's history, basic necessities, and emotional needs. Here are a few tips and tools to help alleviate stress on foster parents, with the ultimate goal of helping you focus on what we as foster parents have all set out to do: provide kids with a nurturing and safe environment to help them grow and heal.

## 1. Use standardized forms to gather information

A big goal of ours at Fostering Families is to standardize some of the systems in the fostering experience that cause foster families stress. The initial placement experience was one of the first topics we tackled. Visit our Resources page at [www.fosteringfam.org](http://www.fosteringfam.org) to find:

**Questions to Ask When Receiving a Placement:** There are things you should ask to determine if a child will be well suited for your home. Refer to this list of initial questions to make sure you are getting as much information as possible.

**Placement Information Forms:** These documents will help you gather a wide range of details, from social worker contacts, to favorite foods, to evening routines, to shoe size. At right you can also see an example of the first page of a form for children ages 6-18.

Speak with the child's social worker and other contacts to fill out the form. Once complete, send it to the child's social worker and your licensing worker. Having this information will hopefully make the child's transition easier and put useful information at your fingertips!

## 2. Advocate for yourself

Don't be afraid to ask for what you need, whether it be time to prepare for a child's arrival, an opportunity to meet the child, information about the child that is outlined in the resources above, etc. Foster parents are often asked to meet the needs of others, but they have needs as well. It should be OK to express them. For example, if a child who

has previously been in care is being placed with you, it is your agency's responsibility to connect you with as many people as possible who have information about that child—their social worker, previous foster parents, teachers, daycare caregivers, etc. Ask to speak with those people. If you do not get what you need, ask again.

## 3. Ask for support

There are extra tasks and emotional energy demands that come with the initial placement period. Giving yourself paths to support will ultimately benefit the children you are seeking to help. Support can come in different forms:

- Post in your local or statewide foster parenting Facebook group about your placement, with a call for any tips/advice/needs. If you do this, make sure you are not divulging any confidential information about the child, of course!
- Send out an email on your neighborhood listserv if you have any equipment needs. Perhaps someone would like to donate.
- Make sure to have a few people approved

for babysitting and respite care and don't forget to use them.

- Ask if friends or families would like to drop off a meal one night.
- If you don't have house cleaning services, consider splurging on a house cleaning.

## 4. Create a "Welcome Book"

Sending a "Welcome Book" before the child is placed in your home can help ease anxieties as they transition to a new place. Many Welcome Books have pictures of the family members, pets, the child's room, the family room, and kitchen. Other details to include could be handwritten welcome notes, details about the neighborhood and nearby activities, and family members' favorite activities, foods, books, and movies.

## 5. Be patient

Transition and healing processes can be slow. Be patient, and be prepared for emotional connection to take time, both for yourself and your child.

*Rochelle Johnson is Co-Chair of Fostering Families ([www.fosteringfam.org](http://www.fosteringfam.org)).*

### Placement Information for Foster Parents

**6-18 years of age**

Below is a list of questions to ask when preparing to place a child in your home.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender: ☐ male ☐ female Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_  
In foster care since (date): \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Child's Social Worker Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Office phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Child's Social Worker Supervisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Office phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Child's Guardian Ad Litem Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Previous Foster Parent(s) Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

#### FAMILY INFORMATION

Mother's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Father's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Siblings and their ages: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other family members close with this child: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Does the child have regularly scheduled visitations with his/her parents and family members?

DAY	FREQUENCY	LOCATION	TIME	DESCRIPTION
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#### MEDICAL INFORMATION

Doctor's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Office name and location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dentist's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Office name and location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Does the child see a mental health professional? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, who and how often?  
Mental health professional's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Office name and location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_  
Medications: \_\_\_\_\_



# What I've learned from transitions

## *Reflections from foster care alumni*

### *I Found My Passions*

Living in an abusive home caused me to have stunted self-esteem and difficulty expressing myself. On and off I would take medication and see therapists, but nevertheless my trauma would prevail. This is because the root cause was my biological parent. Living in their household was constantly reopening my psychological wounds.

I was convinced I needed to tough it out until I was 18, when I could finally leave. That notion was decimated when I realized college financial aid was going to be an issue. My parent threatened to not sign my FAFSA application as a way to blackmail me.

It was time to make a difficult decision. It was time to call Child Protective Services. This time I would not lie to them about my situation. I was a senior in high school and about to graduate, but I needed to get out of my current living situation.

After I reported my situation, I was living in more fear. At first I stayed at my grandparents' on an air mattress, wondering where I was going to end up. I heard horror stories about foster care not working out for kids my age. I knew I was in a very desperate situation. Then a family in my hometown offered their home to me.

Living with a supportive family allowed me newfound confidence. The constant stress of my rocky relationship with my abusive parent had fogged up my ability to realize my strengths and how I could grow. Being with a supportive family also allowed me to realize my privileges today and my gratitude for an improving life. That the family ate dinner together every night dumbfounded me.

At times, I was almost guilty. I almost felt I had abandoned my roots, but with time I found this was not true. My roots, my biological parent, and my past life do not prohibit me from appreciating the new family I live with. I could be grateful for the resources they provided without abandoning who I was.

There was also a sense of forgiveness for my past situation. I had come to understand clearly that forgiveness was going to take years, but I knew my parent had a mental illness they had to deal with and a story of hurt they had to heal from. They were also a survivor of trauma.

These resources and the comfort I began to feel allowed me to get in touch with the passions that were beginning to prosper in my head. I realized I loved to think about how the government and the economy worked. I had a passion for solving problems. I loved learning. I realized that my feelings of not being good enough academically was a falsity. The epiphany I experienced allowed me to fill out my FAFSA application and realize the purpose of an education.

Education is the key to having some influence of changing the world we live in today and the way it treats child welfare issues. Kids who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, kids who are marginalized for their race or for their gender identity, kids who are in gangs, kids who are being abused... these kids are a part of a cycle that must end.

Not every foster kid gets the justice I got, or has the realizations I have felt. Many end up not truly finding a home and find themselves in abusive households again. But my transition was worth it, because through it I learned how to express myself without fear. The decision I made by leaving my abusive parent was valid. I was able to find my passions that were within me.

Through my experiences of poverty and abuse I am sympathetic to these causes, and want to use my passions to evoke a new chapter—a chapter where we pay great attention to child welfare and the education system so we can find better avenues for the youth of today.



Daphne Charlot

### *Mindset: Make the Best of It*

"Time is filled with swift transitions" — Jennie B. Wilson

We quickly learn the truth in this statement as we grow, learn, and develop throughout life. I can personally attest to this phrase being true because I've experienced many transitions in my two-and-a-half decades. I've transitioned from multiple homes from a young age prior to foster care, and have had to adapt to the challenges and changes life brought me.

When I was 15, I made one of the biggest transitions in my life: entering the substitute care system. During my 5-year experience, I've learned that when transitioning, it is important to have a healthy mindset about what is to come, to establish positive supports, and to find and maintain an interest that you enjoy as an outlet. These have been the most helpful to me, especially while in care.

When I first entered care, the transition was not as challenging because I entered the situation with a made-up mind that I would make the best of whatever happens. I can't say I've always done that, but I gave it my best effort. I believe there is so much power in a made-up mind, whether it's to excel or to give up, and we can help influence the outcome of our situation. I learned this while in care and it is something I carry with me in adulthood. If you've won the battle in your mind, you've fought the greatest part of the battle.

In addition to having a made-up mind about how to approach and overcome the transitions of life, I've learned that having the appropriate support aides your success in insurmountable ways. I was baptized and filled with the Holy Ghost my junior year in high school, and developed a strong support circle with individuals from my local church. They, along with my foster parents and social workers, helped me with things such as getting around town if my foster mom wasn't available, listened when I wanted or needed to talk, and even helped me move in to college.

If that support wasn't there for me while transitioning from placement to placement, high school to college, or from college to adulthood, I would have encountered those changes with much more difficulty. I also had a great support in my social workers and foster parents. Through this, I've learned you will always need people as you navigate new areas of life, and it is OK to be selective of those you invite into your life. When a young person is choosing or acknowledging an individual as a support, I encourage foster/adoptive parents, social workers, and others in that youth's life to be inclusive of that person.

One final lesson I've learned while navigating transitions while in care was to find something I enjoyed doing to help alleviate any stress or feelings of being overwhelmed. I enjoy singing, writing, and praying, so these are all things I've done when I was preparing to age out of care at the age of 21, working two part-time jobs, and had 18 credit hours during my second-to-last semester. When I did the things listed above to release stress, I was strengthened and able to think more logically about what steps needed to be taken to continue to move forward.

By learning the importance of a made-up mind, a support system, and outlets to relieve stress, I've been able to navigate the challenges I faced while in care, and am able to better navigate the transitions into adulthood.



Megan Holmes



# Parents can help transitions go more smoothly

by Bob DeMarco

Transitions can be hard. On our best days we handle them well. But on a bad day, or if there is inadequate preparation, hunger, stress, skills, thirst, exhaustion, etc., our ability to cope diminishes quickly.

Often, kids who've been through trauma have several obstacles stacked against their ability to cope with transitions. I invite you to spend a few minutes thinking about transitions in your family—what makes them go well, what doesn't, and what you might do to help everyone handle transitions in the healthiest and most productive way possible.

For the purposes of this article, I've divided the topic in two buckets: "painful transitions" and "everyday transitions."

## Painful Transitions

"Painful transitions" are those that are, well, painful for a child to deal with. Examples include transitions:

- from one home to another,
- from one school to another,
- from living with your siblings to living without them;
- after a visit with your birth mom;
- to and from out-of-home placements; and
- to and from a hospitalization.

This is just to name a few.

Not all painful transitions are "bad." They can include events that are part of life for all of us, like becoming independent, going through puberty, and getting a job. But they do cause pain. These things typically inject some amount of uncertainty, confusion, anger, sadness, and fear into our lives.

As parents, one of our jobs is to help our kids process these feelings and help them to express them in an appropriate way.

But they may also express these feelings in *inappropriate* ways. When that happens, our best play is to love our kids by giving them a listening ear, a mountain of patience, an ocean of grace, and all the reassurance we can offer. Recognize that difficult behaviors are likely to follow for some time, and remind yourself that these behaviors are not about you, so don't take them personally.

We should also remember that we are part of a larger team and that the other team members also have a role to play in helping our kids through difficult times. Teachers, therapists, social workers, resource officers, guidance counselors, Sunday school teachers, mentors, psychiatrists, friends, etc. can all provide support to you and your child, so keep them in the loop as much as you're comfortable.

## Everyday Transitions

"Everyday transitions" are part of regular life in your home. They're things like getting out of bed in the morning, coming home from school, going to church, coming home from ball practice, going to bed, and coming home from a birthday party. These situations are not so traumatic to the child, but can still be a source of stress. And with transitions, it's important to be aware that stress can originate from something *external*, like trouble with a kid at school, or *internal*, like being hungry, tired, or having too much energy.

As is always the case, parents must be detectives to understand the drivers behind their children's behaviors. At least some of the time, there are things we can do to help our kids' everyday transitions go more smoothly.

## An Example

In our home we found that the mornings before school are where we historically encounter the less-than-charming side of our kids. So, over a cup of coffee after the kids were in bed one night, we analyzed what we were seeing and discovered a few things. For example, we found that:

- when there was unstructured time, our kids had trouble;
- my daughter is a very slow mover in the morning and our son is not, and this can be a source of tension between them;
- our son had a better morning if he was woken up in a fun way as opposed to just telling him it was time to get up; and
- there were usually arguments about clothing choices.

Based on these observations, we realized the name of the game was "avoiding." To avoid the things that set the kids' short fuses off in the morning we made changes to our routine that we found to be effective.

In general, we find "divide and conquer" is a good strategy, so my wife and I each have a well-choreographed part in the morning routine. We get up and get ourselves sorted first. Then Lisa heads upstairs to wake the kids and I head to the kitchen. While I'm getting the all-important coffee going, dispensing the meds, getting breakfast figured out, and making lunches, Lisa is waking up the kids (our slow mover first) in the way each responds well to.

Let me pause here for a second. We chose my wife to wake the kids specifically because our son really likes some silly stuff in the morning and Lisa has the energy and temperament to deliver that. I do not...and that's

OK. Play to your strengths! This is about finding what works for you and your family.

Un-pause. We've found we can avoid wardrobe arguments with our daughter by helping her decide on the outfit the night before. Once they are dressed, all three come downstairs together, so there is always a parent present to head issues off at the pass.

Like most kids, ours have a tendency to get into it with each other—no opportunity is missed to throw the other under the bus or argue over who got more orange juice. To minimize conflict, we literally measure out food portions. This has the added benefit of ensuring our son does not pour (and eat) enough cereal for three grown men! Then it's time to depart for school, hopefully with good attitudes.

By doing things consistently this way we've stacked the deck in our favor. On good days big arguments are avoided, although it certainly doesn't work every day.

Now, some of you may be thinking we are catering too much to our kids and that they should just learn to operate within the family schedule. I agree! That is something we hope to achieve—in time and through repetition.

While they learn, our kids need scaffolding to keep everything from crumbling while we try to build. The reality is that their emotional age is far less than their chronological age. This leaves us with a choice: build the scaffold, anticipate that our kids will respond to stress as if they are six and seven, and avoid as many landmines as possible, or get used to arguments. In my case, the tone of my day is set in the morning. If it goes well, I'm set up for success. If it doesn't, then not so much. I choose the scaffolding.

I find that when I'm able to relate a struggle my child has to a struggle I have, I'm better able to be patient with my child as he learns. And when it comes to stress management I can easily relate. A synonym for the word transition is *change*, and change can be stressful for all of us. Relocating, changing jobs, buying a house, having children, getting a new pet, getting married, losing a loved one—these are all stressful transitions.

Most of us have experienced at least one of these. I've experienced all of them, and in some cases several at the same time and I'm sure my wife would agree, my behavior hasn't always been the best.

During those shaky times, I've had people in my life who loved me and helped me find my way to solid ground and hopefully you have, too. Don't our kids deserve the same from us?

*Bob DeMarco is an adoptive parent in North Carolina.*

# Navigating school transitions

Children and youth in foster care sometimes have trouble with transitions at school, especially if they are switching schools due to a foster care placement. To learn what schools and resource parents can do to support these students, we spoke with Molly Pitman, a school social worker in Buncombe County, NC.

## How can schools support students in foster care who are having trouble with transitions?

One of the biggest things is to meet the child where they are. Often teachers think, "Oh, I've had a foster child before." But we can't assume the same things will work for every child. We need to ask questions.

We can also offer options. Maybe the student doesn't want things to be the same as they were in their old school. Maybe they need to participate in a counseling group now, though they weren't ready for that before.

Helping them understand they are not alone is really important. I ran a counseling group for kids who were in or had been in foster care. They got to share their experience and talk freely among other students.

The group was voluntary. We offered it to them and they chose whether to attend. It

gave them this understanding that, "I'm not the only one at school going through this."

## Do school social workers help teachers know how to support students in foster care?

Absolutely. But I'm careful with what I share. It's important for that child to learn to trust that teacher. We need to be careful not to use data about a student's past to make up our minds about what that child's experience is going to be at our school. Kids change. If teachers have preconceived ideas, it doesn't open up opportunities to really get to know the student fully.

## Does Buncombe County's trauma-informed "Compassionate Schools" initiative help kids in foster care manage transitions?

Compassionate Schools benefits all students, including those in foster care. When schools have strategies and skills in place, if a student "flips their lid," we can help them learn to manage themselves so they can remain in class. We show them that they deserve to stay in the classroom and learn with other students.

Everyone, including bus drivers and cafeteria staff, know to be welcoming and inviting and know how to respond if a student gets

upset. It sends a message to that student that they are valuable and that they have a place in that school.

## What would you say to parents whose child is struggling with a school transition?

Communication is the primary thing, especially from the very start. This is not just a regular enrollment. This is a new child for the school **and** for the family. Meeting when they first enroll really helps us get on the same page. It helps parents know, *Hey, if my child complains about this issue, who do I contact? Who are my resources in this school?*

Communicating and knowing who your people are is so important.



Molly Pitman

## Be an Advocate!

If a child in foster care changes schools, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires county child welfare agencies and schools to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with the old school providing all the educational records of the child to the new school. See *Fostering Perspectives*, vol. 23, no. 1 (<http://bit.ly/2V8gqLb>) for more on supporting students in foster care.



Wanda Douglas

# Reflections on promoting independence

## An Interview with Resource Parents Tony and Wanda Douglas

Youth in foster care face unique challenges as they transition to adulthood. To learn more about what it takes to support youth

during this critical time, we spoke with North Carolina foster parents Tony and Wanda Douglas. In their 17 years as foster parents, the Douglasses have fostered over 100 children and adopted four. They also train foster parents on helping youth reach self-sufficiency.

## What do resource parents need to know about youth who are transitioning to adulthood?

We need to recognize that their first priority is to get out of the system. The only thing they want is their freedom, which to them means not having anyone tell them what to do. They don't understand the responsibilities associated with their freedom. Many end up homeless or in jail.

The first 12 to 18 months after they leave care is about **survival**. They need income so they can achieve stability. Once they have that, they'll be able to focus on long-term goals such as going to college, learning a trade, etc.

Youth have skills, but they might be hidden. Find out what they are really interested in and explore how they can use this to earn

income. Think outside the box. What can they do **right now**, with what they have, to pay their rent and meet their concrete needs?

We cared for a youth who enjoyed doing hair and makeup. She created a YouTube channel and made money doing video tutorials!

## What are the main skills youth need as they transition to adulthood?

First, they've got to have tangible skills. They need to know how to find housing, manage their money, and find and maintain employment. They also need to be able to make the right decisions, communicate well with others, and handle peer pressure.

Youth in foster care really struggle with decision-making. Adults have made most of their decisions for their entire lives. We have to prepare them to make decisions that will increase their likelihood of success.

## What are some of your "lessons learned" from working with youth as they transition to adulthood?

We have to let them become young adults. They don't want to be treated like a child. Step back and give them freedom to grow and make choices for themselves. They need to practice making decisions in a safe, supportive place and to deal with the natural consequences. This is what North Carolina's Foster Care 18-

21 program is for.

Normalize that they will make mistakes, and that this is okay. Ultimately, this process helps them learn, grow, and become more independent.

Another big lesson learned to keep in mind is, just because they are 18 doesn't mean they are ready for adulthood. We all mature at different ages. Meet young people where they are. If we push them into adulthood too soon, we set them up to fail.

Adapted from *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 23, no. 1 ([www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org))

**On Their Way** is an instructional video and guidebook that show caregivers what they can do on a daily basis

to help guide youth of any age to plan for their educational and career goals. The guidebook provides discussion points for meals, family activities, and advanced understanding of adolescent development. The curriculum covers education, career interests, decision making, finances, getting help, staying healthy, housing, and staying connected. It is available free through the on-demand courses page of [www.fosteringNC.org](http://www.fosteringNC.org), the NC Division of Social Services' learning portal for resource parents.

**On Their Way**





# Tips to facilitate placement moves for kids of different ages

by Rick Zechman

Whether it's removing a child from their home or moving a child from one foster care placement to another, ideally children, parents, social workers, and resource parents would have the ability to plan for the move. Though the move will likely still be traumatic, planning lessens children's fear and provides them some control, increasing their resiliency.

Familiarity also makes a difference. The less familiar the new surroundings, the more anxiety a child might feel. Workers can help ease anxiety by encouraging the child to bring familiar possessions. Bringing items that smell like home, such as a pillow, clothes, or stuffed animal, can help make a new place less scary.

Here are some strategies resource parents and workers can use to support children through the grief and loss they so often experience during a placement move.

## Strategies by Age

**Infant to toddler age.** Children this age need a consistent, sensitive primary caregiver to feed them, nurture them, and keep them safe. This builds trust in others and the world around them, which is a key developmental task at this stage.

For children in this age range, separation from a caregiver initially causes great distress. They may cry and look eagerly for the caregiver. Or they may be quiet or withdrawn, cranky, or have decreased activity, poor sleep, or weight loss. To make moves easier for children this age:

- Maintain routines as much as possible in the new setting. Find out all you can about the child's routine (*ideally this is done through shared parenting*) so the new caregiver can support the transition.
- Facilitate short, frequent visits (ideally multiple times a week) with birth parents and siblings.

**Age 2 to 5 years.** At this stage, children don't fully understand cause and effect and may blame themselves for the move or use magical thinking to explain what has occurred.

From an emotional and behavioral standpoint, the losses caused by placement may make the child intermittently clingy, anxious, or defiant. They may show grief only once in a while for short periods, and may not make the connection between their feelings of distress and the loss. They may also experience problems with eating, sleeping, and toileting. Some may regress developmentally. Strategies for supporting children in this age group are the same as for infants and toddlers. In addition:

gies for supporting children in this age group are the same as for infants and toddlers. In addition:

- Share information about their placement honestly at their level of understanding.
- When possible, give them pictures of their family members.
- Be patient. Over time, providing a stable, loving, consistently supportive environment will build their trust and help them get back on track developmentally.

**School-age (6-12 years).** These children are likely to be scared, confused, and overwhelmed by a placement move. This can hinder their ability to process new information. Because children this age are often unable to remember what is told to them about the move, they may develop distorted ideas about the reasons for placement. Their grief responses will often affect their schoolwork and behavior. They may be anxious or depressed, lose interest in activities, or have changes in eating and sleeping. They may also show greater impulsivity or aggression.

To make moves easier for children this age:

- Ask them what they need to help them feel comfortable and supported. This gives them a sense of control and builds trust.
- Listen to their feelings, answer questions, and assure them they are not to blame.
- Tell them—in a sensitive way—what is happening with their family. Repeat as needed.
- Provide the child with age-appropriate books related to grief, loss, or foster care.
- Maintain their contact with parents and siblings through all available means (visits, calls, email, text, FaceTime, etc.).
- Partner with the child's teachers so they are supported in and out of school.
- Support their involvement in extracurricular activities.

**Adolescence (13-17 years).** Issues of independence, resistance, alienation from adults, and separation from parents are developmentally normal for all youth at this stage. A placement move can complicate or hinder this developmental work for youth in foster care.

For example, the stress and loss of a move may make a teen feel more vulnerable and needy at a time when they would normally be feeling independent and focused on their lives outside the family. Or, they may feel the need to attend to younger siblings, which may mean they have less time and energy for

their own development.

Youth at this stage experience grief much like adults. They may act out or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol to manage the intense feelings. Be prepared—in adolescence the anger stage of grieving may be the most noticeable. The anger may be directed towards any number of sources, such as birth parents, workers, foster parents, or peers.

Many of the strategies to make moves easier at this stage are the same as for school-aged children. Additionally:

- Involve adolescents in decision-making. Give choices whenever possible.
- Give them the helpful handbook, "Understanding Foster Care" (<https://www2.ncd-hhs.gov/info/olm/forms/dss/dss-1516.pdf>)
- Avoid changing schools. This will help them academically and sustain positive social connections/relationships that provide them emotional support.
- Promote normalcy. Encourage their involvement in activities (proms, driving, etc.) that will help them develop additional healthy, supportive relationships.

These strategies will build the social and emotional competence of children and youth, which is a protective factor that enables children and youth to thrive. Building their competence in this area helps them self-regulate their behavior, effectively communicate their feelings, and interact positively with others. Also, boosting emotional competence helps young people get back on track (or stay on track) with developmental milestones.

## One More Tip

There is one more strategy that can make placement moves easier for everyone. Be sure to plan for and use respite care. Work with a few other foster families to develop a network of respite support and use them often. This concrete support is another protective factor that will help you manage your stress and sustain the strength needed to support children and youth when they are grieving. Though being a resource parent is rewarding, it's hard to do it well if you are overwhelmed.

Respite may be short-term, but that temporary relief can improve your family's health and stability and ultimately lead to better outcomes for youth in your care.

*Rick Zechman is an educational specialist with the UNC-CH School of Social Work.*



## Writing Contest

### What I want to do for a living

We asked young people in foster care, "What do you want to do for a living? What are you doing—or what do you plan to do—to reach this goal?" Here's what they had to say.

#### Kywren, age 15

I want to be someone who cares for other people. I want to give to the poor. My dream is to own my own business and to help others with my business by donating money and giving jobs. I really want to give to others because I hate for people to be hungry. Some people are stealing to eat or fighting to eat. I want to change that by giving back. Giving back is the best thing to live for in life. I will do this by graduating from high school and learning a trade under someone who is successful.

KYWREN RECEIVED \$100 FOR TAKING TOP PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.



*My dream is to own my own business and to help others.*

1

#### Yahir, age 14

I want to work outside creating fences, gardens, and a lawn service. I plan on working with my friend's brother who has a landscaping business. I am going to get a job at Bojangles like some of the kids at the group home I live in. I will save up my money to buy supplies. This will make the job easier. Then, after I've been working for some years, I will try to get a landscaping business of my own. I also would like to help children in a mental hospital so I can teach them the things that I learned.

YAHIR RECEIVED \$50 FOR TAKING SECOND PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.



*I want to work outside creating fences, gardens, and a lawn service.*

2

#### Londyn, age 9

Change has been a part of my childhood for awhile. I have been in foster care since I was six years old. But my family has always told me that ever since I could walk, I loved to dance. When I grow up I want to be a famous dancer just like Misty Copeland. She inspires me so much. I plan to achieve this goal by a lot of hard work and practice. I know that if I keep my faith in God, I can do anything I put my mind to.

LONDYN RECEIVED \$25 FOR TAKING THIRD PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.



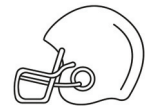
*Ever since I could walk, I loved to dance. When I grow up I want to be a famous dancer just like Misty Copeland.*

3

#### The Work I'll Do Some Day

When I grow up and graduate high school, I want to go to college to get a master's degree. When I get the master's degree, I want to be a lawyer and also an NFL player. When I become a millionaire, I am going to donate a lot of money to every hospital and homeless shelter in my community. I'm going to help other countries like Africa, Nigeria, and India. I'm going to work hard to change myself to be a better person.

— Donaven, age 15



*I want to be a lawyer and an NFL player.*

I want to have a family and own my own home. I will do this by getting my behavior straight and working to get out of the group home. I want to have children and a beautiful wife. I want to have everything that I missed out on in my life. It will be hard work, but I have to do it.

— Jacob, age 13

*I want to have everything that I missed out on in my life.*

I want to be an NBA superstar. My plan is to first get all A's and B's for the rest of the school year. I will do this by studying every day and practicing basketball for three hours each day. I will continue this until I go to the NBA. But if I can't go to the NBA, I would want to be a doctor. My grades would back me up to be a doctor if I don't play basketball professionally.

— Latron, age 14



*If I can't go to the NBA, I would want to be a doctor.*

I want to be a monumental source of help for others. My drive and my passion is to make sure everyone, no matter the race, religion, or situation, is OK. I find myself writing to inform others that they are not alone. I want to create an environment that is safe. I want to create a place for solidarity. With the help and opportunities that I have been graciously offered, my first step in this plan is to get the word out. I want to make sure everyone I know or associate with feels comfortable talking to me about anything. I want to gain a sense of trust. I want to give people something to live for. That is what I want to do for a living.

— Rocky, age 15

*I want to be a monumental source of help to others.*

THE YOUNG PEOPLE ABOVE RECEIVED \$20 FOR HAVING THEIR ESSAYS PUBLISHED.





Kelly Sullivan

# Is this normal? Navigating the sometimes surprising developmental transitions of children and youth

Human development is phenomenal. We enter this world completely reliant on others for survival, yet eventually we become self-reliant. This is not a smooth process. Instead, development is often a bumpy road with nail-biting detours that can give caregivers gray hair.

Developmental transitions for children and youth in foster care can be even more erratic due to the experiences they have had. Furthermore, complex processes, such as sexual development and development of attachment, aren't sudden changes that occur at one stage, but instead happen throughout childhood.

Below are some of the trickier developmental hurdles resource parents may face with their child or youth in care, and ideas for how to respond.

## **We want them to be independent, but getting there can be painful!**

Shifting primary attachment figures from your caregivers to your peers is a normal developmental task that typically takes place in adolescence. In fact, on average, the most securely attached children are going to intermittently push away or reject primary caregivers with increasing frequency as they age. If youth don't do this work, they can have tremendous difficulty forming a healthy romantic relationship as an adult.

Although it's very important, this stage can be painful for caregivers. The rejection is physical, emotional, and ideological. For example, as teens struggle to find their own identities and belief systems, they may experiment with different identities (e.g., emo, nerd, hipster). This can be a source of conflict with caregivers.

All this is to say, youth in foster care who don't seem to "listen" to their caregivers may actually be going through the normal process of attachment development.

Yet for youth in care, finding and establishing an identity may be more confusing because they may either have a lack of or neg-

ative connection with their biological family or culture of origin. Resource parents often hope youth can put the past behind them, but for most kids in care this may do more harm than good.

That's because usually things are not that clear-cut. Most children have some positive associations with their families. Additionally, youth trying to understand themselves and their identity often experience a yearning to understand their birth family and why their family was disrupted. Resource parents will promote optimal identify development and better attachment if they simultaneously encourage communication about the youth's family of origin and provide consistent, sensitive caregiving.

## **"Routine" medical appointments may not feel that way to youth.**

Youth exposed to sexual abuse may be triggered or re-traumatized at routine medical appointments. Additionally, some youth in care have had the experience of a medical exam to determine the probability of abuse. These exams are invasive and can be traumatizing themselves. This means routine medical exams can be very anxiety-provoking.

During all medical exams and procedures, it is important that the youth are informed about how they will be touched and understand the purpose of each procedure. Caregivers can help by finding out what the exam will consist of and explain it to the youth in advance. During the appointment they can also advocate on behalf of the youth, asking medical providers to carefully explain everything to the youth and ask permission before touching.

Preparing youth for medical exams is especially vital starting at age 10. That's because at this point exams become more invasive and because in adolescence and pre-adolescence our bodies are more sensitive to being touched and exposed.

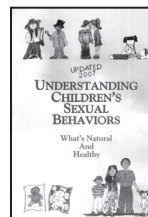
Please know, some medical providers in North Carolina give

## **Understanding Children's Sexual Behaviors:**

**What's Natural and Healthy** by Toni Cavanaugh Johnson

*An excerpt from the introduction:*

When a child (under age 12) is engaging in sexual behaviors it is sometimes difficult to decide when the sexual behavior is natural and healthy and when it may be an indication of some distress or disturbance. This booklet provides a definition of natural and healthy childhood sexual behavior and describes how to develop these behaviors in your child. A section describes how to respond to children's sexual behaviors in order to promote good boundaries. Twenty characteristics of problematic sexual behaviors in children are described along with information on how these problematic sexual behaviors are developed. Charts describe children's "natural and healthy" sexual behaviors, behaviors "of concern," and those in need of professional evaluation. Information is provided on how and where to look for help if an evaluation seems warranted. A continuum of childhood sexual behaviors, from natural and healthy to children who sexually offend, is described. (Publisher: Neari Press, 2015).



youth 13 and over the power to limit a caregiver's access to medical records. This may catch some guardians and caregivers off guard. Youth in care need to be informed about their rights and the pros and cons of limiting access to their medical records before they make this decision.

Relatedly, older youth are often examined without a caregiver present. While this ensures privacy, youth may be unprepared to talk about their needs. For example, they may want contraceptives, but be too timid to ask. Access to contraceptives can be important for youth in care, since they are twice as likely to become pregnant by age 19 than youth not in care (Courtney, et al., 2007). Helping youth advocate for their needs in situations like these promotes their social and emotional competence, which is a key protective factor.

## **Is this sexualized behavior or curiosity normal?**

Sexual development begins early. Children age five and younger find touching their private parts comforting. Curiosity about others' private parts begins around the same time.

You may be surprised to learn that the current thinking on talking to children about sex and sexual development is, if the need for conversations hasn't surfaced before then, age "8 is great!"

Sexual development may be complicated if a child has been sexually abused or exposed to inappropriate sexual content. It is also important to know there is some evidence children who have been sexually abused begin puberty earlier (Noll, et. al., 2017).

Providing guidance and support to children about sexual development can be tricky for any parent. To be as helpful as possible to children in care, resource parents should become knowledgeable and "askable" on this topic. When parents show discomfort with normal curiosity about sex and private parts, children may feel shame and be less likely to seek information from adults. Resources like the one in the box above can be critical for determining whether behaviors are normal or warrant assessment and treatment. Resource parents will also benefit from using books with their child or youth that explain sex and sexual development. Some of these use a light-hearted tone that can help make conversations more comfortable. Additionally, rather than having "the talk," children and youth will benefit most from multiple conversations over a span of years.

Kelly Sullivan, PhD, a Licensed Psychologist, is Director of Mental Health Services at the Center for Child & Family Health and an Assistant Professor at Duke University Medical Center.



# Resource parents feel it, too: Managing your grief when a child leaves your home by Jonathan Rockoff

"So it's true, when all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love."

This poignant line is from E.A. Bucchianeri's *Brushtrokes of a Gadfly*, a novel about coping with grief, loss, and trying to get on with daily life despite the hardships happening around you. This is something anyone can relate to—especially resource parents.

## The Grief of Children and their Families

If you're a resource parent, you understand the grief experienced by children in foster care. You know grief's five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance).

You have been taught, reminded, and then reminded again how children are grieving from the second they come into foster care because they have lost everything they know and hold dear.

Resource parents know youth grieve. They are there with them through the process and will do whatever they can to make it even just a little bit easier.

As they practice shared parenting, resource parents also see the grief stages of shock, protest, and adjustment that birth parents go through when their children are in foster care.

But children and their families are not the only ones involved with foster care who are touched by grief.

## A Mixed Bag of Complicated Emotions

When I trained new resource parents, I would always tell them one of the hardest parts of their job is becoming attached to a child who will likely one day leave their home. Going into this, you are told reunification is the ultimate goal. And most placements do end with the child moving out of your home. However, you can't appreciate the magnitude of this until it happens to you. Even then, it's not something you get used to.

Many people have told me they could not be a resource parent because they were afraid of their own feelings if or when a child left. I understand. Being a resource parent is a mixed bag of complicated emotions. You will likely feel happy, excited, sad, and anxious all at once when a child moves out of your home.

## We Ask a Lot

As child welfare professionals, we ask and expect our foster parents to be strong and stoic when a child moves on. We ask them to

put on a brave face during transition, so as not to cause guilt or more trauma for the child.

After the child moves out, professionals tend to pull away from the resource family. In a way, this makes sense. After all, the family no longer has a child placed with them and social workers have other children to focus on.

The family shrinks in size over night.

Often foster families grieve alone. Due to confidentiality, resource parents are not allowed to share the details of their cases with others in their support system, even after the child leaves.

I have heard from many resource parents over the years that the grief caused when a child moves out of their home is the hardest part of fostering. This can sometimes lead to a family deciding to stop fostering. For some families, it is too much to handle.

Something needs to be done to ensure when a child moves, resource parents feel supported as they grieve so they can continue being an asset to youth in North Carolina.

## Tips from Resource Families

Here are a few suggestions I hope will be helpful to resource parents the next time a placement ends and a child moves out of their home. These ideas come from foster parents who had a child leave, experienced grief, but got to the point where they could continue fostering.

**1. Take a break.** Many parents take a break after a child leaves. Before jumping back in with a new placement they take time and recharge their batteries. During this interval they do things they could not when the child was with them. They take a trip, do a project around the home, or just sleep in for a few weekends.

Whatever it is you like to do for self-care, take the time to do it. You may get calls from your supervising agency asking you to take placements again. Please make sure you are completely ready before you say yes. Taking a placement before you're ready just to please your agency could lead to an unplanned move for the child (this is also called a placement disruption). Unplanned moves can be traumatic and set children back developmentally, so we want to avoid these whenever we can.

**2. Reach out.** Even if you prefer to grieve privately, consider reaching out to others who have been through something similar. Call on



*What works for resource families experiencing grief?*

other foster parents, your support system, a local support group, or your child's social worker to process your feelings. Of course, be mindful of confidentiality: only share your feelings, not what led to the removal of the child or their story. See a professional if you think that will help.

## 3. Focus on and learn from the positives.

Take time to reflect on what went well with the placement. Even if the end of the placement was unplanned or abrupt, there were likely things you did very well. It is very common for resource parents to feel guilt and shame when a child has an unplanned move. It is important to accept that you did the best you could. Look back on what you did well. Learn from the experience, process it, and apply what you did well next time around.

## 4. Take care of your family.

I can't stress enough how important it is to check in with the members of your family. Even if your partner, your children, and extended family are putting on a brave face, ask how they are doing. Acknowledge their grief. The child who left likely felt like part of the family to everyone in your family. Process this loss together.

## Conclusion

My purpose in writing this piece is to assure resource parents they are not alone when grieving the move of a child. This truly is one of the most difficult aspects of being a resource parent. We ask resource parents to give all of themselves and pour their heart out to a child that will most likely leave their home.

I always thought the resource parents I worked with were some of the most selfless people I ever met. I still think that. They give and give every day. I hope every resource parent knows it's OK to take care of themselves, too.

*Jonathan Rockoff is a Training Specialist with the Family and Children's Resource Program at the UNC School of Social Work.*



# How agencies can (and should) support children and resource families when placements end

Foster care placements are temporary—they are meant to end. This is made abundantly clear in recruiting materials and in foster parent pre-service training. In court and in ongoing meetings there are frequent reminders of this fact.

Nevertheless, the ending of a placement can be particularly hard for the children and resource family. Fortunately, there are things child welfare professionals can do to help resource parents and children achieve closure. Helpful steps agencies can take include:

**1. Talk with the Children.** It's important to allow children the chance to express any feelings they may have about saying goodbye, which can include feelings of abandonment, sadness, anxiety, or unworthiness. Some children might act out around this time, so agencies should help resource parents prepare to provide extra support as needed. Don't let feelings of guilt or stress lead the adults to minimize or avoid talking about negative feelings (Bostic & Shadid, 1996). While ideally this process could happen before a child leaves, in reality it might be the new caregivers who give the child this opportunity.

**2. Talk with the Resource Parents.** Foster parents and kinship caregivers also need a chance to express their emotions, which may come out gradually. While they can share feel-

ings of sadness with the child, there may be other feelings (such as relief or fear for the child's future) that cannot be shared with the child but need a safe outlet.

Resource parents may still need support AFTER the child has left the home. You can sometimes help families process their feelings—and avoid burn-out and turnover—by asking them to reflect on the experience after a week or two. What were their expectations when the child arrived? What was it like while the child lived with them? What are their hopes for the child's future?

**3. Pictures and Letters.** Families and children can write letters or draw pictures for each other, depending on the child's age. This can be done either in preparation or after the fact, by mail. Resource parents should also consider spending time with the child updating his life book so the child has something to help him reflect on his time in the home. Make sure resource parents understand how important it is for them to tell the child he will be missed. Parents may also want to share something special that the family will remember or has learned from the child.

**4. Reinforce Strengths and Lessons Learned.** Families can also use time before a placement change—or the letter they send after the move—to reinforce and acknowledge



*Agencies can reduce trauma to children when placements end by teaching resource parents to anticipate child reactions and by suggesting activities that help everyone reach closure.*

the positive changes or successes the child has had, even if they were small steps. They can also help smooth the way for the new placement by asking the child what she's learned during their time together and what should be shared with the new placement providers about what was helpful or not helpful for her.

**5. Assess Foster Parent Supports.** When a child leaves is an excellent opportunity for workers to reassess with the family what informal or formal supports, information, or training might be helpful. Resource parents can use the change as a positive opportunity to make new connections, learn new skills, or simply think about how they might handle similar situations in the future.

## Updates from SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out)

### SaySo Welcomes New Program Coordinator

SaySo is pleased to announce its new full-time Program Coordinator, Ms. LeAnn McKoy. A native of Columbus County, Ms. LeAnn earned her bachelor's from ECU and is pursuing a master's degree in Public Administration from UNC – Pembroke.

Ms. LeAnn worked in several county departments of social services in a variety of service areas. She has over 15 years of experience in child welfare, including nine as a LINKS Coordinator.

In 2007, she attended her first SaySo event and fell in love with the idea of young adults advocating for themselves and building the capacity in their peers. Ms. LeAnn has been an adult advisor to SaySo since 2012. SaySo adult advi-

sors must be unanimously approved by SaySo's youth board of directors.

Ms. LeAnn has traveled for local, state, and national events to support the SaySo Youth Board. She was a key adult that supported guiding the Board in evaluating several recent legislative and policy changes, including the Foster Care Family Act (S.L. 2015-135), which promoted normalcy for youth in care, and NC's Foster Care 18-21 Program.

Ms. LeAnn is invested in SaySo and is dedicated to helping this generation of young adults thrive. Her focus is on empowering them to develop their inner potential. Ms. LeAnn sees SaySo as a family that builds lifelong connections and opportunities for young people to advocate not only for themselves but the thousands of other young adults who have experienced substitute care.



LeAnn McKoy

### SaySo Wins Community Voice Award from NC Child

On April 5, 2019, the statewide advocacy group NC Child presented SaySo with the first-ever Community Voices Award in recognition of its ground-breaking advocacy. SaySo, or Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are, or have been, in the substitute care system in North Carolina.

"SaySo's members have firsthand experience of North Carolina's child welfare system," said Michelle Hughes, Executive Director of NC Child. "Youth who experience foster care know better than any of us what needs to be done to make that system work for kids who need a safe, stable, loving, and nurturing place to call home."

In its 21-year history, SaySo has grown from a small group of young people coming together every few months, to 27 chapters across the state and a membership of over 750 young adults.

Carmelita Coleman, SaySo's program director at Children's Home Society of NC, notes: "The goal of these young leaders is to help youth and young adults leave foster care with a brighter future, and most of all with the belief that their voices matter."



If you have questions or want to start a SaySo chapter, contact SaySo at: 800/820-0001 (toll-free) Email: [sayso@ilrinc.com](mailto:sayso@ilrinc.com) Web: [www.saysoinc.org](http://www.saysoinc.org)



# Overlapping and continuity of families are the keys to positive, stress-free transitions for children

by Donna Foster

News flash! After 17 years as a foster parent and 37 years as a trainer in foster care and adoption, I finally realized what the focus should be for foster parents: *transitions*!

## So Many Opportunities for Loss

Think for a moment about the transitions a child in foster care goes through. The child is taken from his birth family to go to a foster home with strangers and then either back to his birth family or to an adoptive family. In most cases, the child has little knowledge or input into these changes. He is like a puppet on a string without a voice.

Every transition is an opportunity for loss for a child in foster care! Let's consider some of these transitions and the losses that sometimes accompany them.

**Initial Placement.** The changes start when a child leaves his birth family to go to a foster home. This foster family is full of strangers with a different lifestyle and different ways of communicating. The child leaves everyone and everything that identifies him: family members, pets, teachers, where he sleeps, where he eats, what he eats. He leaves his possessions and routines. He is forced to leave his "whole life" behind.

**A Changing Identity.** While with the foster family, the child forms new attachments. Besides the foster family, he may gain new friends, teachers, pets, routines, and experiences. These become a part of his identity. So even if he had losses when he left his birth home, he may have made gains in his foster home. But will he lose these gains when he goes home?

**Reunification.** With this plan, the goal is for the child to one day leave the foster family to return to his birth family. This, too, is a big change, because while the child has been in foster care the birth family has changed to be a safer home for the child. That means that when the child returns home, what he once knew as the family routine may have changed. His possessions may be gone. His family may have moved. What he thought was "normal" in his birth family may not be normal now. It is likely healthier, but it is still a change.

Because he may have formed attachments in his foster home, moving back to his birth family can be joyful and painful. These and other transitions can cause lots of grief and mistrust for the child.

## The Shared Parenting Team

The most important adults in his life need to help him make these moves with less trauma and grief. The best team to do this is made

up of the foster parents and birth parents, with the social worker's support. The team's job is to make the child's transitions less stressful and painful, both emotionally and physically.

This is **shared parenting**. Shared parenting creates the bridge for the child to cross over from one home to another, gaining safety and avoiding loss as much as possible.

## Partnering with Birth Families

Foster care does not exist to punish the birth parents for not taking care of their children. Many roadblocks have interfered with these families' ability to parent. Children enter foster care for safety reasons, so the birth parents can receive the help they need and learn how to care for their children.

While they are in foster care, children need and deserve ongoing opportunities to be nurtured by their birth parents. This continued contact lessens the trauma of separation and makes the move back home smoother.

## Overlapping from the Start

Shared parenting—and the child's transition home—should begin the day the child enters foster care. The foster parent should contact the birth parent as soon as possible. A phone call during the first 24 hours could relieve the child of feeling totally alone and know his parents are aware of his whereabouts. The call would assure the birth parent the foster parents are there to help them, not hurt them.

The call is a chance for the foster parent to ask the birth parent (*assume in this example it is the mother*) how she wants the foster parent to take care of her child. Asking this opens the door for the birth parent to "parent" her child while the child is in foster care.

After the call, the foster parent can tell the child she spoke to his mother, and that his mother wants him to have a nightlight, or to brush his teeth before bedtime and after breakfast, or to avoid drinking milk because it upsets his stomach. The foster parent may know how to parent a child, but this information from the birth parent helps the child to have a sense of his mother being **with** him while he is in the foster home. This means he won't feel the loss of his birth family, or at least not feel it so acutely.

As the relationship builds between the birth and foster parents, more interactions can take place—for example, they can be



*Including birth parents from the start keeps "home" close by, which is what we want for the child.*

together at doctor appointments, school activities, birthdays, and other family-oriented activities. Through this ongoing contact, without knowing it, the birth parent may learn more healthy ways to parent and how to live a positive life. In this way, the foster family becomes a support for the birth family.

## Continuity at the "End"

When shared parenting is successful, when it is time for the child to be reunited with his family, the foster family and birth family make this happen together. The birth parents encourage a continued relationship with the foster family because the families have built a friendship.

Including the birth parents from the start keeps "home" close by, which is what we want for the child. We don't want the child to feel he has to lose everyone and everything he knows when he enters foster care.

In this kind of transition the child keeps connected with his birth family when he is in foster care, and keeps connected to the foster family after reunification. With strong connections between the two families, the child never has to lose his identity. His identity grows.

During all of these changes, it is important for the child to be informed of all decisions and to have some power in how he wants his life to be. Being able to make even small decisions is important to a child's well-being.

If adoption is the permanent plan, the process would be similar—the foster family engages the adoptive family as soon as they are known. The adoptive family interacts with the foster family while the child is with the foster family. When the child moves into the adoptive home, the foster family visits the adoptive family. This way the child can gain a permanent family without losing important people in his life.

## Conclusion

Can you see how this can work? Overlapping and continuity of families are the keys to more positive and stress-free transitions. Children deserve this kind of commitment from the adults that make their life-changing decisions. Planned transitions make a difference for a lifetime.

*Donna Foster is the author of "Shelby and Me: Our Journey through Life Books," a national trainer, and a consultant who lives in Marshville, NC.*



# Help us find families for these children and youth

For more information on these children or adoption in general, call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 <[www.adoptnckids.org](http://www.adoptnckids.org)>



## **Skyon (age 7)**

Skyon is an energetic and helpful little boy who loves nurturing attention. He is described as funny, empathetic, and active. He loves any outdoor activity, especially riding his bike, playing catch, playing basketball, and helping with yard work. He absolutely loves superheroes. Spiderman is

his favorite. Skyon will do best in a two-parent family that includes both a mom and a dad where he is the youngest or only child. Skyon needs a lot of attention and high levels of structure and consistency to succeed.

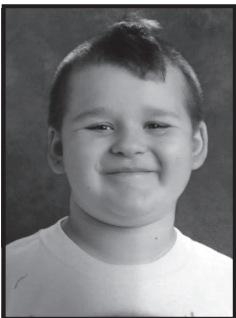


## **Timere (age 10)**

Meet Timere! This handsome little boy is affectionate, engaging, and curious. Timere often sports a bright smile and exudes a winning personality. Further described as a natural athlete, Timere loves to swim and play basketball and baseball. He also enjoys playing video games, riding

his bike and reading books.

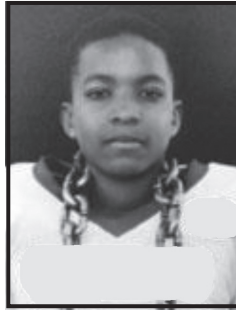
The ideal forever family for this little boy is a two-parent home with a strong, positive male role model. While Timere would do best as an only child, he could thrive as the youngest child in the right home. It is also important that the family for Timere is open and committed to allowing him to maintain birth family connections.



## **Nathan (age 11)**

Nathan is a bubbly, sweet, kind, loving, friendly, compassionate, and helpful young man. He enjoys being social and interacting with others. His favorite activity is helping his foster mother in the kitchen with cooking and cleaning. Nathan enjoys being outside, fishing, playing with Legos, and making comic books.

Nathan thrives on consistency and structure and benefits from his foster mother's calm voice, patience, and gentle nature. He will benefit from a loving environment that provides him with structure, routine, and support as he continues to grow.



## **Glenn (age 12)**

Glenn is a kind, friendly, energetic child who likes to be a "helper." He enjoys playing video games and sports. He was introduced to football and has excelled in the sport. He makes friends easily and interacts well with his peers. He is not shy about engaging others in conversation or play.

Regarding adoption, Glenn is happy and excited, having already expressed his desire to be adopted. He would like a family that allows him contact with his siblings and friends and play football, and that will help him pursue other interests he may develop.



## **Emilee (age 13)**

Emilee is a sweet, kind, helpful child with a "spicy" personality. She is described by those who know her best as loving, respectful, unique, and resilient. She loves any creative outlet, including art, drama, pottery, cooking, and baking. She aspires to go to culinary school to be a pastry chef when she grows up. Emilee also loves animals, going to the beach, and playing chess or checkers.

Emilee's family needs to have a comprehensive understanding of trauma and loss. She needs to feel heard and to have control over things that are appropriate for her age. Emilee will thrive in a family who can provide her with love, affection, security, and acceptance.



## **Dixie (age 13)**

Dixie is a delightful, beautiful young lady with big dreams of having an adoptive home where she will have that wonderful sense of belonging and acceptance that comes with having a warm, nurturing family. This young lady has an easygoing personality and has no difficulty establishing friendships. Dixie is described by those that know her best as caring, funny, loving, and unique. Dixie is quite determined in her academics and maintains great grades.

An active, fun family would be beneficial for Dixie as she is lively, energetic, and full of enthusiasm for life. Her forever family should be able to meet her where she is emotionally and place effort into building a strong, secure bond with her in order for her to feel safe and loved.



## **Leah (age 17)**

Leah is a vivacious and artistic child who has persevered through tremendous challenges. Leah shows great musical and artistic talent. You can always tell when Leah is having a good day because she will be singing. She also loves to play the guitar, draw, write, and do art and craft projects. Leah also likes sports and enjoys playing basketball.

Leah is a resilient and brave child who has recently warmed up to the idea of adoption. Her family will need to understand the importance of being patient and showering her with the love and support she needs to continue to thrive.



## A reader asks ... What is KinGAP?

I heard something about a new program called KinGAP. What is it?

KinGAP is the name of North Carolina's Kinship Care and Guardianship Assistance Program. KinGAP is considered when a child or youth's best interests are to stay connected to their birth parents and extended family and permanency is unable to be achieved another way.

KinGAP is a payment program that provides monthly cash payments to legal guardians of youth who were in foster care, if certain eligibility criteria are met.

If a youth in the custody of a county child welfare agency is at least 14 years old but not older than 18, and the court has determined that reunification and adoption are not options for the youth, KinGAP may be an option. There must be an identified prospective guardian that has a strong commitment to permanently caring for the youth. In addition, the prospective guardian must be licensed as a foster parent for at least six months prior to guardianship being awarded by the court.

The youth will need to be consulted about the KinGAP arrangement and be in the permanent family setting with the prospective guardians for a minimum of six consecutive months after the family has been licensed.

If a younger child (ages 0-13) is a sibling of a youth who meets the age requirements of KinGAP and this younger child is placed in the same guardianship arrangement, then the younger child is also eligible for KinGAP.

In North Carolina "kin" can be related to the child or youth by birth or can have demonstrated a "family-like" relationship with the child or youth. Kinship relationships can include a child or youth's foster parent, family member, close friend of the family, or a person that the child has developed a bond with. Licensed kinship caregivers and licensed foster families willing to provide a permanent home for the youth in their care may be eligible for KinGAP.

Legal guardians have the same responsibilities as a parent. They are responsible for the day-to-day care and supervision of a child or youth placed with them. The legal guardians will make decisions about the child or youth's future, which include ensuring the child or youth's educational, medical, dental, mental health, and social needs are being met. Social Services will no longer have legal custody of the child or youth once legal guardianship is estab-

lished. However, Social Services is still available to provide supportive services as requested by the family.

KinGAP is designed for older youth in foster care to achieve a permanent placement with a relative or kin, when otherwise they would age out of foster care at age 18. Over 70 youth have achieved permanency through KinGAP since its implementation in North Carolina in January 2017.

For more on KinGAP, visit <http://bit.ly/2ZkAjOv>, where you will find the fact-sheets "Foster Care and Beyond: Kinship Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance" and "Comparison Chart for Caregivers."

.....

**The children in our home are transitioning back to their birth parents. We know we'll get questions from the community about where the children went. How do we explain?**

Having a strong support system and being members of tight-knit communities help resource parents weather the surprises and occasional storms that inevitably come their way. Yet when children must leave your home due to the need for a placement change that better suits the child's needs or because permanency has been achieved, the people you rely on and are close to may have questions.

Here are some tips for responding to those questions, managing the event in your family and community, and making sure the overall transition is healthy and positive for everyone involved.

**Maintain the confidentiality** of the children, their birth parents, and any others involved. Specifically, avoid sharing significant details about the progress made by the birth parents or the child's needs.

**Educate and celebrate.** Use this chance to make sure your friends and family understand how important resource parents are in your community. This should be an opportunity to celebrate your role in the successful return of the child to their birth family or transition to an adoptive home.

**Prepare a response** such as, "The children have returned to their biological parents. We are excited for them but sad for us and not ready to talk about it yet." Remember that all parties involved—including the child—need the opportunity to feel sad, angry, concerned, and happy. Honor and validate everyone's feelings, even feelings that are conflicting.

**Smooth the way for the child.** It is important that children receive the same

## fostering perspectives (May 2019)

**Sponsors.** NC Division of Social Services, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the UNC School of Social Work's Jordan Institute for Families.

**Contact Us.** *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Email: [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu).

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**Newsletter Staff.** John McMahon (Editor)

**Mission.** *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare professionals and foster, kinship, and adoptive parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system in our state can exchange ideas.

**Disclaimer.** The opinions and beliefs expressed herein are not necessarily those of the NC Division of Social Services or the UNC School of Social Work.

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**References.** See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.

message from all adults involved in this transition, including "emotional permission" and approval to leave the home and community. Make sure the children get a chance to say goodbye to friends, family, and community members if they will not remain a daily part of the children's lives. This will also prepare everyone for the transition and prevent you from having to answer questions once the children leave.

**Don't jump to conclusions.** Don't assume that because the children are leaving your home, they'll no longer be a part of your life or community. The intention of shared parenting is for birth and resource parents to work together to parent children. Shared parenting can continue after reunification, with you and your community providing ongoing support and love to the birth parents and children.

Many dynamics occur when children transition out of a foster home. Always plan for transitions and work together with your supervising agency to manage the conversations and information you share before, during, and after a child's transition.

Response by the NC Division of Social Services. Have a question about foster care or adoption you'd like answered in "A Reader Asks"? Send it to us using the contact information in the box above.



# FFA-NC is here to support you!

Hello foster, adoptive, and kinship families. How can we help you?

In October, Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina (FFA-NC) established 1-800-578-7770, a toll-free number for families or anybody with questions regarding becoming a resource family. So far we have had families call our 800 number regarding:

- the challenges of getting licensed because of water on or near their property,
- guardianship,
- becoming licensed to provide foster care,
- and other concerns.

We even received a call from a family who met a child at an adoption match event and were having trouble with next steps. If you have questions or need to know more about your rights or any other challenge you are facing, please give us a call. We are here to help strengthen, educate, and support you.

We have also been holding events throughout the state to hear how our families are doing. The one thing that has become evidently clear is that our families need more support, so we are in the process of putting together programs to provide just that.

And welcome to the FFA-NC! If you are a foster, adoptive, or kinship family in North Carolina you are automatically considered a member of FFA-NC. One of our biggest objectives this year is to hear from our families. Your voice needs to be heard! Please fill out the survey found at the following link: <http://bit.ly/2GrWXwV>. Take this survey for a chance to win a \$100 Amazon Gift Card! This survey will drive the development of additional programs to serve you.

Lastly, this year we will continue to hold meetings throughout the state. If you are part of a group or would be interested in having us schedule an event in your area, please contact Kate Norwalk (800/578-7770, ext. 2). We will provide training on topics where our families have indicated they need more understanding, and to help you understand some of the changes taking place throughout our state regarding foster children and families. We welcome families as well as agencies and organizations serving youth in care at these events and look forward to starting to establish partnerships to better serve the kids.

We welcome you to FFA-NC and look forward to meeting each and every one of you!



## FFA-NC Executive Board



**Maurita McCorkle**, *Executive Director*, has been an NC foster parent for over 17 years. She has had over 70 youth in her home over the years. She adopted two teens in 2012 and she and her husband are in the process of adopting two young adults. They also provide housing for young adults, helping them transition to independent living. Maurita has a certificate in nonprofit management from Duke University and is trained to provide trauma-informed support to kids in foster care. Maurita also served as Vice President and President of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association for three years. She has a great passion for foster care not only in our state, but our nation as well. [maurita.mccorkle@ffa-nc.org](mailto:maurita.mccorkle@ffa-nc.org)



**Shane Lunsford**, *Board President*, has been a foster parent for over ten years and is committed to giving foster parents a voice and the support they need. He has an undergraduate education in organizational leadership and a graduate degree in marketing. He has been in the healthcare field for over 20 years, much of it in leadership roles. Shane currently resides in Black Mountain with his wife, Erin, and their five kids. He brings expertise in nonprofit leadership, marketing, advocacy, and education to FFA-NC. He looks forward to working to ensure foster parents' voices are heard at the local and state levels.

**Board Vice President:** *Vacant*



**Kate Norwalk**, *Board Secretary*, has worked for over 10 years with children and youth, from infancy to adolescence, in a variety of settings including group homes, inpatient mental health facilities, and the public school system. Kate is a professor in the Psychology Department at NC State University and also partners with NC State's Center for Family and Community Engagement to develop training resources for foster parents of children and youth with developmental disabilities. [kate.norwalk@ffa-nc.org](mailto:kate.norwalk@ffa-nc.org)

**Treasurer:** *Vacant*



**Stephen Fletcher**, *Communications Officer*, received his B.A. in Psychology from Mars Hill College. For over 18 years he has been working in behavioral health care in a variety of settings, including juvenile justice, foster care, adoption, post-adoption, and social services. Stephen has expertise in training, marketing, recruitment, LGBTQ youth advocacy, project management, and grant management and writing. Stephen's passion is to provide advocacy and support to children and families.

**Legal Counsel Officer:** *Vacant*

**7 Regional Board Chairs:** *Vacant*

FFA-NC is currently seeking individuals to fill the above vacancies, all of which are voting positions. Applications and descriptions of the responsibilities and terms can be found on our website at <http://ffa-nc.org/>.

## Understanding Guardianship and Adoption

Foster Family Alliance of NC strives to ensure foster and kinship care families are educated regarding processes that affect them and children in their care. The differences between guardianship and adoption is one subject we have identified where parents struggle to understand the meaning and ramifications involved. We provide the information in this box to help you make informed decisions about guardianship and adoption.

### Guardianship

- Gives guardians care, custody, and control of the child/youth, including responsibility to act as parent to the child (e.g., ensuring the child receives the basic necessities and a proper education).
- Birth parents may retain their parental rights.
- Court orders that award guardianship sometimes also outline other stipulations, such as giving birth parents visitation rights.
- Can be revoked **only** if the court finds the birth parent is willing and able to care for the child **and** one of the following is true: (i) the relationship between the guardian and the juvenile is no longer in the juvenile's best interest, (ii) the guardian is unfit, (iii) the guardian has neglected a guardian's duties, or (iv) the guardian is unwilling or unable to continue assuming a guardian's duties.
- If birth parents pursue custody, guardians must obtain (and pay for) their own legal counsel.

### Adoption

- Permanently terminates the rights and responsibilities of birth parents, including any say in the care of the child.
- Adoptive parent assumes all rights and responsibilities of caring for the child.
- Birth parents do not have legal visitation rights. Visits are up to the adoptive parents.
- Adoption is permanent and cannot be overturned by the birth parents.

Sources: NC statute (NCGS 7B-600) and NC child welfare policy

# Writing Contest

First Prize: \$100 • Second Prize: \$50 • Third Prize: \$25

If you are under 18 and are or have been in foster care, please send us a letter or short essay in response to the following question:



**Who are the most important people in your life? How do you maintain connections with them?**

*(Responses should be 200 words or less.)*

**DEADLINE: Aug. 6, 2019**

E-mail submissions to [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu) or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, CB#3550, UNC School of Social Work, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Include your name, age, address, and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards listed above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published, for which they will also receive an award.

## Seeking Other Writing Submissions

Submissions can be on any theme. There is no deadline for non-contest submissions: submit your work at any time.



## Join the Fostering Perspectives List!

To be notified by email when new issues appear online, go to <http://eepurl.com/brPe9b> and sign up.

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## Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your licensing social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. If you have questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit, ask your worker.

### In-Service Quiz, FP v23 n2

1. In what ways can life books make transitions better for kids in foster care?
2. Name three of Rochelle Johnson's tips for making initial placements easier.
3. Describe the "scaffolding" the DeMarco family put in place for their morning routine. What scaffolding have you put in place (or might you put in place) to assist the children in your home?
4. Name three suggestions from the Douglasses for promoting independence for youth in foster care.
5. What three things helped Megan Holmes navigate the challenges she encountered while in foster care?
6. In what way is a willingness to use respite a protective factor for resource parents—and therefore for children and youth in care?
7. What does Donna Foster mean when she talks about "overlapping" and "continuity," and what does she see as their benefits?
8. What is KinGAP?
9. How can you enter for a chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card from FFA-NC?
10. What advice does Molly Pittman have for parents whose child is struggling with school transitions?



**A learning site for North Carolina's foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers**

The NC Division of Social Services is proud to offer [fosteringNC.org](http://fosteringnc.org), a learning site for our state's resource parents. This site features online courses, webinar recordings, videos and podcasts, and answers to frequently asked questions.

### Free Online Courses Include:



**Child Welfare Services: Overview, Key Terms, and Resources.** Part of the "Stakeholder Engagement Series," this 25-minute course gives a high-level overview and explains how you can get involved in strengthening child welfare services in North Carolina. <http://fosteringnc.org/cw101/>



**A Resource Parent's Guide to Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD).** This 1-hour course provides basic information about IDD, the services you may need as a resource parent and where to find them, and best practices for parenting a child or youth with IDD. <https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/>

Foster parents are encouraged to talk in advance to their supervising agency about obtaining training credit through [fosteringNC.org](http://fosteringnc.org).

### Join the [fosteringNC.org](http://fosteringnc.org) List

To sign up to receive news and updates go to:  
<http://eepurl.com/cEiAYP>

Scan this QR code to go directly to the site



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