



Connections



September

La Crosse County
Human Services
Dept.

Volume 10, Issue 9
2008

Fostering Success in School

Many foster parents contend with problems related to their children and the schools they attend. The facts are that foster children trail behind their non-foster peers in school. For a variety of reasons, higher numbers of foster children and adolescents have poor attendance rates, perform below grade level, show behavior and discipline problems, and qualify for special education. Foster youth often repeat a grade and drop out at twice the rate of their peers.

Here's how Mr. and Mrs. Akers describe their situation:

We have our first foster child, a 12-year-old boy named John. He has been in several foster homes and his birth parents moved a lot when he lived with them. He has attended at least 11 schools in his short career. He is a bright kid but he has two major problems: he does not get along with other kids at school and he will not do his homework. John sets himself up for rejection by other kids. Maybe he expects they will not like him and then guarantees it by the way he treats them. He also refuses to do any homework unless we stand over him for hours. Then he does not turn it in the

next day. Go figure! We are in daily consultation with the school. They call with the latest problem or fight; they also put some pressure on us to get John to perform better.

Why Do Foster Children Often Struggle in School?

Children like John struggle in school for a variety of reasons. First, most of these kids have been victims of maltreatment. As a result, they have been taken from their biological parents and have been placed in foster care, an additional stressful experience. About 30 percent of children in foster care suffer from significant emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and/or developmental problems, most of which are undoubtedly related to a history of maltreatment and the dislocation of out-of-home placement. Physical (and dental) health problems are also common.

Second, more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic consume the minds of foster children. They often blame themselves for the abuse they suffered;

(continued on page 4)



Inside this issue:

Mark Your Calendar	2-3
Fostering Success in School (continued)	4
Check It Out! Book recommendations	5
Fostering Perspectives	6
Kid's Stuff	7

"It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself."

Joyce Maynard



Mark Your Calendar!

Special Events for Foster Families

Thursday, September 18th Foster Parent Banquet & Golf Outing Drugan's, Holmen

Remember to RSVP to Rhonda Rude if you haven't already!

Thursday evening, October 2nd

Torchlight Parade

La Crosse - North side

Bring the whole family and help represent La Crosse County Foster Care! The parade begins at 7:00pm. Those walking with us should arrive *no later than 6:30*. Look for an upcoming mailing on the parade line-up for details on where we will meet. Or, call Rhonda Rude or your alternate care social worker for more information.

Thursday evening, November 20th

Holiday Open House

Children's Museum

Fun Community Events

STEM Saturdays Sessions are designed to give youth in grades 4-8 a chance to explore the wonderful world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in a fun, hands-on way. To register go to <http://www.uwlax.edu/conted/stem/> for a printable registration form. For more information call the UW-L Continuing Education and Extension Office at (608)785-6500. Enrollment is limited. \$29 per class (scholarships are available).

September 20, 9:00am-12:00pm Myrick Park Marsh Plants and Animals

Discover the interesting plants and animals that live in Myrick Park Marsh. We will see the large and small through a magnifying glass on our walking trip to the marsh. We will collect samples of animal eating plants and find microscopic animals. Instructor: Tim Gerber, Ph.D., Biology

October 18, 9:00am-12:00pm Where on Earth?

Learn how GPS satellites use mathematics to triangulate your position on the surface of the earth, use GPS units in a race to find a hidden treasure, and develop a way to measure the size of the earth. Instructor: Jen Kosiak, Ph.D., and Jon Hasenbank, Ph.D, Mathematics

November 15, 9:00am-12:00pm Crime Scene Investigation: The Case of Jason Worth

A missing heir. Money, power, and mystery. Student sleuths will use the same tests that a forensic scientist would use to discover who kidnapped Jason Worth by analyzing blood samples, finger prints and other evidence to solve the crime. Instructor: Faye Ellis, M.S., Biology

September 26-October 4

Oktoberfest

Saturday, Sept. 27, 10:00am

Maple Leaf Parade

Tuesday, Sept. 30, 11am-2:30pm

Special Fester Day (For individuals with special needs)

Visit www.oktoberfestusa.com for a complete schedule of events!



Mark Your Calendar!

Training Opportunities

FOUNDATIONS - Fall schedule

Saturdays, 9:00am-4:30pm

November 1st, 8th, 15th, and 22nd

Trainers: Richelle Zimmerman and Kathy Lysaker. Call Rhonda Rude at (608) 789-4834 to sign up.

Sept. 11 & Oct. 9 9:30am-3:30pm (9am Registration)

Did You Know? Now You Know!

Black River Falls

Do you know how to advocate for your child's health care needs? Information will be presented to support you on your journey of caring for a child or youth with special needs.

Topics for Thursday, September 11th session:

- Parents as Partners
- Community Support Services
- County Based Programs
- Surviving Waiting Lists
- Advocacy
- Private Insurance Plans
- Choosing a Physician
- Creating a Medical Home
- Working Collaboratively With Your Medical Provider

Topics for Thursday, October 9th session:

- Medicaid And How To Get What You Need For Your Child
- Medicaid Waiver Programs
- Prior Authorization and Medical Necessity
- Steps For Getting Services, Supplies And Equipment
- Parents As Advocates
- Systems Changes

Attending both sessions is encouraged; however you are welcome to attend only one of the sessions. This training is provided at no cost to participants. Lunch will be provided. To sign up, call or email Nancy Olson at (715)355-8458, nancy@fvofwi.org. This training is co-sponsored by Family Voices of Wisconsin and Black River Falls Department of Health and Social Services.

Upcoming Workshops at Family Resources, 1500 Green Bay St.

For more information or to register, call 784-8125. Child care may be provided.



Thursday, Sept. 11, 6:30-8:00pm

Getting the Most for Your Food Money

Topics include meal planning, grocery shopping strategies, ways to stretch a recipe and decreasing food waste. Presented by Sheila Harding and Mary Hoeft-Leithold - La Crosse UW Extension.

Thursday, Sept. 15, 6:30-8:00pm

Assets...the More the Better!

It's never too early to be aware of the significance assets will play in your child's life. Come be informed and learn what personal assets children need in their lives to be successful and ways to build them. Presented by Mary Nelson, Student Services - School District of La Crosse

(Fostering Success...continued from page 1)

they pine for a return to their family--even if they were maltreated. They experience the limbo of waiting for someone to adopt them. They feel powerless about the moves they make from one foster home to another. Many struggle with allegiance issues, torn between love of birth family and growing attachments with their foster family. Insecurity and uncertainty about the future surrounds them daily. Bedeviled by all these worries and sentiments, it is no wonder they lose focus in class and place school at the bottom of their priorities. After expending so much energy worrying about survival, absent families and getting along with their foster parents, schoolwork and failing grades may seem a bit trivial.

Third, frequent foster home moves and corresponding school changes force children and youth in care to adapt to many different schools, rules, courses and teachers. Transferring from one school to another, and perhaps still another, hampers fitting in at their present school and connecting with teachers and other students. As the new-kids-on-the-block, they may be either withdrawn or aggressive in relationships as a way of protecting themselves or avoiding the stigma of being a foster child. They might use disruptive or defiant behavior to get attention or to save face, or they

might reject others as a form of "pre-emptive strike," expecting to be rejected themselves. Sometimes, social withdrawal allows foster children to prevent shame and avoid or escape harassment or bullying.

Can we change this? Yes!

Of course, schools can and must do better. Teachers of foster children can teach and support them more effectively if they know about the unique, complicated issues that foster children and their families face and how these issues affect learning. Teachers and other school personnel need to know about the importance of working with foster parents for the benefit of the student. Some foster children have significant behavioral disorders and act out at school; teachers need tools to handle these problems adequately. Teachers should have access to background information and past school records as soon as possible to improve their ability to teach and support foster children and youth.

However, teachers are not daytime foster parents. It is important for foster parents also to help their children be successful. Here's how you can help your foster child(ren):

- Stay involved with the school. Get to know your child's teacher and take part in parent-teacher conferences and school activities.
- Stay current. Find out exactly your child is doing academically,

behaviorally and socially as early and as often as possible.

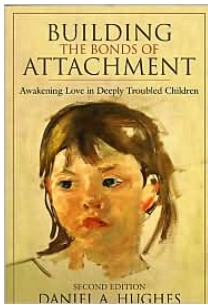
- Advocate for your foster child's education. Learn about your child's educational rights and be persistent about obtaining services that address any of his or her learning or behavioral disabilities.
- Coordinate your efforts with those of your child's social worker. Collaboration with the teacher and caseworker may offer the best "team approach" to meet your child's school needs.
- Set high but realistic expectations for success. Reinforce your child's talents, self-esteem and "can-do" attitude. Give your child ample verbal support and encouragement for trying his or her best at school and for working on homework.
- Keep school in perspective. Don't let school concerns devour your time at home with your foster child. Home is where you offer your child the stability: a supportive, nurturing, loving home. While it is important to become and to stay involved in your child's education, you are not a professional tutor.

By Rick Delaney, Ph.D., author, presenter, trainer and clinician. From Connections newsletter, September 2007 issue, www.fosterparentcollege.com.



CHECK IT OUT!

Recommended reading for parents and children



Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children
By Daniel A. Hughes

The mind of a child is a unique realm of imagination, play and development. But the mind of a child traumatized by abuse and neglect remains a mystery. As psychologists continue to study the effect abuse and neglect have on children, author Daniel A. Hughes provides a practical assessment in "Building the Bonds of Attachment" through the eyes of one such child--Katie.

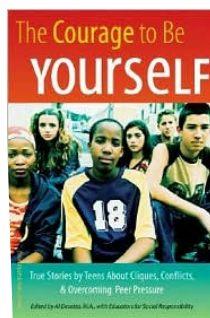
Though Katie is a fictional character, she represents many of the children Hughes has worked with one-on-one as a psychologist. She also represents children throughout the nation and world who have experienced abuse in their young lives. Hughes does a wonderful job telling Katie's story through her eyes and through those who are determined to help the little girl overcome her difficulties--diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, attachment disorganization and oppositional defiant disorder among others. Hughes takes readers on Katie's emotional journey from an abusive family to several foster placements to therapeutic foster home and finally to a loving adoptive family. Her journey is long and difficult, filled with many pitfalls brought on by the initial abuse and neglect she experienced since infancy.

Hughes does a remarkable job of bringing Katie and all of her demons to light. Readers will find themselves in tears with frustration as they anxiously await the outcome of Katie's young life. At the close of each chapter, Hughes discusses the reasons for Katie's behavior and how the therapy she receives attempts to correct her early childhood trauma.

This is a beginner's book to understand trauma caused by abuse and neglect in the formative years of childhood. It easily describes behaviors that readers can identify in themselves and their own children who may have experienced abusive trauma. "Building the Bonds of Attachment" is definitely a must-read for every foster parent, especially those parenting children with difficulty attaching.

*Reviewed by Kim Phagan-Hansel
From Fostering Families Today,
January/February 2008*

Visit the author's website at www.danielhughes.org to purchase this book online.



The Courage to Be Yourself: True Stories by Teens About Cliques, Conflicts, and Overcoming Peer Pressure

Edited by Al Desetta, M.A. with Educators for Social Responsibility

Book Jacket: Dwan listens to rock music, uses big words, and can't

dance very well. So her friends--even her own family--accuse her of not being black enough. Rana, an Arab American, became a target of hate after the September 11th terrorist attacks. Nadishia is harassed because she doesn't wear the latest designer clothes, Jennifer because she's overweight. Yen gets teased for being Chinese, Jeremiah for being gay, Jamel because he won't smoke marijuana.

In 26 first-person stories, real teens write about their lives and how hard it is to be themselves--especially when they're bullied, picked on, pressured, excluded, and disrespected. They ask tough questions, like "Why does everyone have such a problem with me?" and "Should I change myself to fit in?" Maybe you've asked yourself these questions.

Reading this book is like talking with teens who've been where you are, gone through what you're going through, and know what it's all about. These stories don't have easy answers. They don't all have happy endings. There are no magic solutions to the problems these writers face--or the problems you may face. But the message is clear: You can't control how others see you, but you can control how *you* see you. Conflict can make you stronger. And you can survive almost anything when you have the courage to be yourself.

The Courage to Be Yourself can be borrowed from our Alternate Care unit library.

Stop in and check it out!

fostering perspectives

Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services and the NC Family and Children's Resource Program

Vol. 2, No. 2 • Spring 1998

Teaching with Praise

by Shawn Vogel and Kara Chatham

Many child care professionals will tell you time and again of the importance of praising your child. But as anyone who has tried to follow this advice knows, it is easier said than done.

As parents, it is often easy for us to focus on the inappropriate behaviors, but more difficult to see the appropriate or approximations of the appropriate behaviors. We tend to take for granted what our foster children know and what we need to be teaching them. We sometimes feel that by only correcting the inappropriate behaviors, we are doing them justice. What we really need to consider is being more conscientious about praising their accomplishments, no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential.

A common error many of us make is to think, "My child knows when she does something right. I don't have to tell her." Unfortunately, many of the kids we serve in foster care do not always know right from wrong, good from bad, and therefore, they are unable to make determinations about when they have done something well.

When foster parents praise kids, they are setting limits and expectations and providing opportunities for kids to feel successful. When kids feel more successful, they have more self-esteem and want to continue doing better because they are reinforced for doing so.

Praising kids is an easy thing to do, once you get used to it and once you know an effective way of doing it. The following are a few things you will need to do to ensure that the praise you provide is effective.

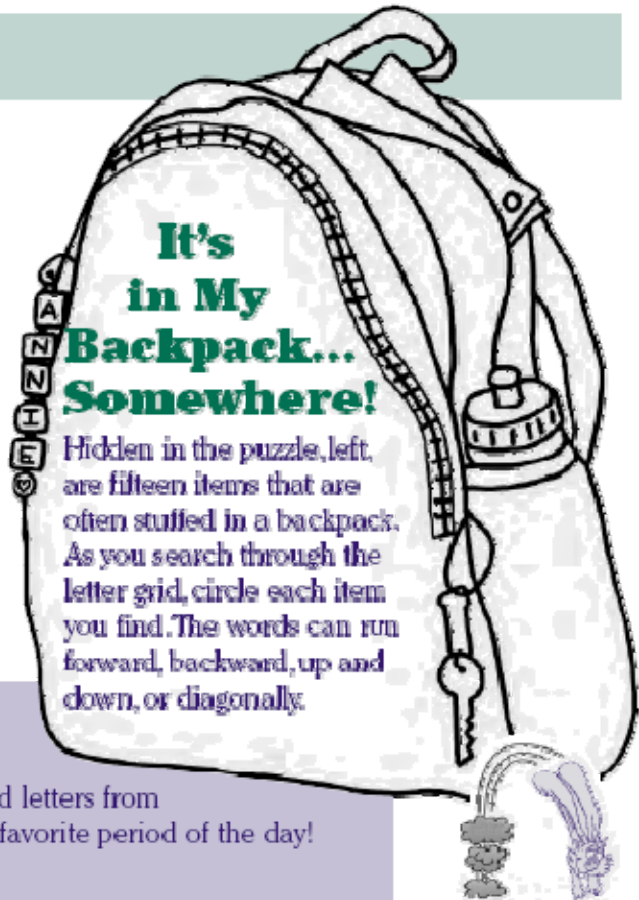
1. **Praise specific behaviors.** If you are not specific with what you are praising them for, kids will get confused and will not be reinforced by your teaching. *Example: "You did a super job cleaning your room by picking up your toys and putting them away."*
2. **Give the child a reason how it will benefit him or her.** Kids like to know why it is important for them to engage in certain behaviors. Giving reasons allows you to help the kids see the benefits of appropriate behaviors and explains how these appropriate behaviors will help them at school, with their siblings or family, etc. The reason you give must be child-oriented so that it makes sense to the child. What adults see as benefits are not always the same as what kids see as benefits. *Example: "When you do what I ask right away, you will have more time to play with friends."*
3. **End your interactions with general praise.** Reinforcing once again with praise allows the youth to feel good about what he or she has just done. It also ends the interaction on a positive note.
4. **Vary your praise.** There are times when you can have "too much of a good thing," and this applies to certain works associated with praise (i.e., "good job"). Praise can be very positive unless you constantly use the same words to express satisfaction with the kid's behaviors or performance. Foster parents must vary the words that they use so that the praise comes across as sincere and meaningful.
5. **Catch 'em being good.** You cannot praise your child effectively if you do not observe situations where they are engaging in appropriate behaviors. You need to make concerted efforts to catch your child being good and reinforce that child with praise. *Example: Two children are playing a game together without arguing and fighting. Praising the children by saying, "You are playing very well together. I'm proud of you," is a good way to reinforce their appropriate behavior.*

So, praise your kids for the little things they do as well as for the larger achievements. It makes you feel good, and the kids appreciate the recognition!

Shawn Vogel, MS, Coordinator of Evaluation and Kara Chatham, MA, Coordinator of Training and Recruitment, Methodist Home for Children, Raleigh, North Carolina.

SCHOOL DAZE

J I H Z O R B S J S
 K A P E N C I L P N
 J R C J F O N S O A
 B O O K S E D T S C
 M Y Y W E W E D R K
 O G M P E T R R E R
 N T S A M M U G K U
 E P E P P D O L R L
 Y E K E S U O H A E
 M N E R A S E R M R



Hidden in the puzzle, left, are fifteen items that are often stuffed in a backpack. As you search through the letter grid, circle each item you find. The words can run forward, backward, up and down, or diagonally.

Subject Scramble

Each scrambled word is a subject you take in school. Unscramble them all, then read the circled letters from top to bottom. They will spell out many student's favorite period of the day!

1. DIGNERA.....
2. CENCIES.....
3. HATSEMICAMT.....
4. DESHYP.....
5. LIOCAS DUTESIS.....

MYSTERY WORD _____

Fast 'n' Funny
 How many books can you put in an empty backpack?
is not empty!
One, because then it



Answer to circled letters: RECESS

Answers to scrambled words:
Subject Scramble
 1. READING
 2. SCIENCE
 3. MATHEMATICS
 4. PHYS. ED.
 5. SOCIAL STUDIES



LA CROSSE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

300 4TH SREET NORTH
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN 54601

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Pass the word on!

Do you know anyone who's interested in being a foster parent? Orientation sessions for those who'd like to learn more about the program are held the first Monday of every month from 6:00 - 7:00pm. Those interested in attending should call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834 to sign up.

Is there anything you'd like to contribute to our newsletter?

Please send it to:
Attn: Sharon McHugh
La Crosse County Human Services
300 N. 4th St.
La Crosse, WI 54601
mchugh.sharon@co.la-crosse.wi.us
(608) 785-6056

We welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have!



Foster Care & Adoption
Resource Center

Looking for information on foster care or adoption? The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center provides the following services:

- Resource lending library
- Links to training opportunities and resources
- *Fostering Across Wisconsin* quarterly newsletter

Visit their webpage at www.wifostercareandadoption.org or contact them at their toll free number 1-800-947-8074 .