

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, contact Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.

Ombudsman Corner

Every month, there are many national and international celebrations dedicated to raising awareness and support for different meaningful causes. The month of May is packed with daily, weekly, and month-long celebrations and observances. One of the more important ones is known as National Foster Care Month. In 1998, with the encouragement of the National Foster Care Association, Senator Strom Thurmond introduced a resolution to proclaim the month of May as National Foster Care Month. This same year, President Ronald Regan issued the first presidential proclamation establishing May as National Foster Care Month.

National Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to educate the public about the needs of children and youth in foster care; to dispel misinformation and promote understanding and support for this vulnerable population (www.holidaycalendar.io/holiday/national-foster-care-month). In addition, during this month, time is set aside to honor and acknowledge resource parents, family members, and other members of the community who have dedicated their lives to caring for and supporting children in foster care.

On behalf of the Kern County Department of Human Services, I would like to wholeheartedly reiterate the words of Penny Talley: "Thank you for wanting to make a difference in a child's life and for being the safety net during challenging times. Your impact on the lives of our children is immeasurable."

We appreciate you!

CASA of Kern County

Court Appointed Special Advocates or CASA is a child advocacy program that recruits, trains, supervises and supports lay volunteers for appointment by the court to help determine the best interest of children and non-minor dependents in the child welfare system. CASA of Kern County was established in 1994 and has served around 3,600 children.

The sole purpose of CASA is to be a voice in the juvenile court system for children who have been abused or neglected. As resource parents who provide day to day care for foster youth, you may have worked alongside a CASA volunteer to support the best interest of the child. CASA volunteers are an important asset to the child and family team, just as you as

the caregiver are, because you too are that voice for the youth. When a foster youth is court appointed a CASA volunteer, that volunteer will be required to visit the youth on a weekly basis, monitor the needs of the youth and ensure that they are getting the services needed, aid in communication with other professionals involved with the child's case and communicate the needs of the youth to the court.

As resource parents, it is a conflict of interest to become a CASA volunteer, however, if you know someone who would be interested in helping and desires to be a voice for a child who doesn't have one, please have them visit the CASA website www.kerncasa.org for more information.

Melissa's Message

The Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) is a national movement for foster care change, made up of a network of states, counties; including Kern, and private agencies committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships in order to thrive and grow.

QPI has been a key aspect in child welfare in Kern County and as we continue to be QPI focused, we wanted to take the time to remind our resource parents of the fundamentals of QPI and why this initiative is so important.

QPI is established on the belief that excellent parenting and strong, positive relationships are the best intervention we can offer children on their road to healing. QPI helps to create a system that promotes excellent parenting by supporting the involvement of birth families, relative caregivers, resource families, young people and others in the child welfare system.

QPI is defined by three core principles that explain the foundation of this initiative.

1. Consistent excellent parenting and meaningful relationships are the most important services we can provide to children and youth in foster care. Every policy, practice action, and statement the system adopts should strengthen parenting skills and relationships.

2. Research on child, youth, and brain development and the effects of trauma not only demonstrates the importance of parenting and positive relationships but also provides guidance on how best to support them. Agency policy and practice should be informed by research.
3. The individuals most affected by policies and practices are in the best position to design and implement change so that systems ensure excellent parenting and meaningful relationships for children who enter their care.



By implementing these core principles into our work as social workers, caregivers, and other child welfare professionals, we can better the outcomes for the youth and families that we serve.

For additional information about QPI, please contact your RFA Social Service Worker or visit www.qpi4kids.org.

Resource Family Friendly Business

The Department of Human Services would like to remind our resource families about the Resource Family Friendly Business (RFFB) Partnership program! This program offers additional support to our Kern resource families by collaborating with local businesses to offer discounts on goods and services. Resource families can access these discounts using their RFFB member ID card that is mailed to them once they are approved.

We highly encourage you to use these discounts. The discounts that the participating businesses are providing are available for your resource family even when a foster child is not currently placed in your home. Most importantly, this program is entirely FREE to resource families! A heartwarming thank you goes out to the following businesses who are helping to support our Kern resource families: American Kids Sports, Catalado's Pizza, Darrell's Automotive, Don Perico Mexican Grill, Fresco Mexican Grill, Jersey Mike's Subs, Max Muscle Nutrition, Papa John's Pizza, Respawn, Rio Bravo Jiu-Jitsu, Valley Children's Ice Center and Wendy's.

For questions regarding the RFFB Partnership program, please contact your Resource Family Specialist Melissa Sojin at 661-873-2382.



Keeping Kids Safe Online



Children are growing up surrounded by technology in today's digital era. The internet plays a major role in our active lives, like reading news online, checking our weather app or playing games, the internet has become an important tool for us. Even though the internet offers a plethora of information and opportunities for learning and entertainment, it also comes with numerous risks, especially when it is at our children's fingertips.

Before we explain internet safety to our children, we need to understand the dangers and risks for ourselves. It requires a bit of research, but in keeping up to date, you will be better equipped to talk to your kids and prepare them on what to expect online. The internet can be an overwhelming experience, which is why we must talk to our children about the dangers that it poses, such as inappropriate websites, malware (viruses) that can be downloaded onto devices, frauds/scams and sexual predators.

- **Inappropriate Content**-With the vast amount of content one can find online, it is a no brainer that there is a lot that is not suitable for children. A child's development can be negatively affected from exposure to explicit material,

violence or hate speech.

- **Cyberbullying**-Anyone can be anyone on the internet and with that comes the ability to bully others without being identified. Children who experience cyberbullying can feel emotional distress and psychological harm.
- **Online Predators**-Predators often frequent online spaces that are created for children, likely pretending to be a peer in order to establish trust. Predators engage in grooming and exploitation techniques that lure children to them.
- **Privacy**-Children may unknowingly give out personal information online that could put them at risk of identity theft, scams or even physical harm if their location data is shared.

Fortunately, there are proactive measures that caregivers can take to ensure a child's online safety. Prudent Parenting with foster youth is essential with internet safety. While foster youth have a right to a cell phone and other devices that access the internet, you as the caregiver can create house rules that help keep them safe. Here are some examples of what you can do:

- Keep the computer/tablet in a common area in your home to monitor activity.

- Be informed of all the electronic devices that your youth uses to access the internet.
- Create an online safety contract with the youth that will help start a conversation about online risks and setting boundaries.
- Watch for changes in the youth's behavior that may indicate cyberbullying or inappropriate contact.
- Ensure that no child under 13 years old has a social media account as it is against the law under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule.
- Keep open communication with your youth; be honest about the potential dangers and talk about what cyberbullying/inappropriate behavior may look like online.

By having these open conversations with our children and explaining that you want to keep them safe online, we create a space for our kids to feel comfortable enough to talk to us if/when they should experience any online encounters that pose a danger. While it is not possible to keep kids 100% offline and away from the risks of internet, we can all do our part to ensure we teach our children to be safe online and to talk to us when they do not feel safe.

Safe Sleep & Crib Safety

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 3,500 babies in the U.S. perish suddenly and unexpectedly every year while sleeping, with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) often being the cause.

To prevent the risk of SIDS and other sleep related infant fatalities; please view the best practices for safe sleep below:

- Infants 12 months or younger must be placed on their backs for all sleep times including naps and at night.
 - Even if a baby spits up during sleep, babies' anatomy and gag reflex help prevent them from choking while sleeping on their backs.
- Infants can share the room with an adult, but must have their own sleeping space. Use a firm sleep surface (mattress) in a safety approved crib/bassinet. Further, any spaces that are shared with the infant must be approved by your RFA Social Service Worker.
 - Accidental suffocation or strangulation can happen when a baby is sleeping in an adult bed or other unsafe sleep surfaces. Sharing a room with the



baby is much safer than bed sharing and may decrease the risk of SIDS by as much as 50%. In addition, placing the crib close to your bed so that the baby is within view and reach can also

help make it easier to feed, comfort, and monitor the baby.

- Do not keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads or soft toys in the baby's sleep area.
 - Some caregivers may feel they should add sheets or blankets to the baby's crib to help keep the baby warm and comfortable while sleeping. However, sheets, comforters, and blankets can increase the risk of suffocation or overheat the baby. Instead, dress the baby in warm clothing such as a long sleeved, footed onesie or a wearable blanket known as a sleep sack. The only bedding item allowed in a crib is a fitted sheet for the mattress.
- The crib must have the proper guard rails and have a mattress that fits snugly without gaps.

For more information about safe sleep for babies, please talk with the child's pediatrician.

You can also visit <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/features/baby-safe-sleep/> for more information and resources.

Tips to Ensure Water Safety this Summer

We all know how hot it gets in Kern County in the summer and escaping to the pool, lake, river or beach is the likely option for beating the heat. While engaging in water activities is a great way to keep cool and have fun; above all, it needs to be safe. According to statistics, drowning is the leading cause of death in children ages one to four. As caregivers, you can help lessen that statistic by following these simple tips.

- Closely monitor children around all bod-

ies of water at all times.

- Avoid distracting activities such as reading or using your phone while supervising.
- Incorporating bathroom breaks and diaper checks to help prevent water illnesses caused by germs and chemicals.
- Wearing life jackets, especially on water vehicles and wherever there are strong currents present.
- Keep up to date with your CPR certification.

- Ensure your pool area is secure and not easily accessible to young children. Please follow Resource Family Approval Written Directives concerning gates/fencing around pools and/or alarm systems for all doors and windows leading directly to the pool area.

Following these tips can help ensure that your summertime by the pool or any body of water is a fun and memorable experience for everyone.

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