

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

With the onset of autumn and winter quickly approaching, I would like to wish you warmest greetings of this festive season. Holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Kwanza, Christmas and celebrating the new year, are exciting times as they bring people together. By this time, many of you are already involved in a flurry of activities, like decorating, purchasing gifts, preparing for trips, baking holiday goodies, or visiting with family. This time of year is filled with joy, excitement and it is a special time for creating new memories and enjoying family fun.

Because the holidays are commonly associated with family togetherness, this time of year can be very difficult for children in the foster care system. A foster child in your home may experience conflicting feelings of missing their biological parents, family and friends. The thought of being in unfamiliar situations are often emotionally stressful and listed below are some suggestions that I hope will help you to navigate through the holidays.

- Talk about your family's traditions and activities and invite the foster children to share about their traditions and beliefs. Please be mindful of religious differences.
- When possible, involve the birth parents. Talk to the child's social worker about how to involve birth parents. Make sure to keep scheduled comfort calls and visits with parents and siblings. This will help ease the child's anxiety about being away from family.
- Prepare friends and family before you visit. Let them know in advance about a new family member in your home. Also, prepare the child for what to expect.
- Expect the unexpected. Grief and sadness is unpredictable and can be exhibited in various ways.

Wishing you a season filled with love, laughter, and unforgettable moments.

Happy Holidays!

Kinship Supportive Services Program

Henrietta Weil Memorial Child Guidance Clinic has a great resource for our relative and non-related extended family member resource families called Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP). KSSP is a great resource for families who are looking for support in the following areas:

- Guardianship assistance
- Case management
- Individual, family and group counseling
- Support groups

KSSP also has fun activities for the youth, such as kid's night (age 5-12), teen night (ages 13-17) and family night. If you are a kinship resource family and would like more information about KSSP, please visit www.hwmcgc.org, call (661) 371-3360 or speak with the primary social worker of the foster youth in your care.

Melissa's Message

Positive Methods to Changing Behavior

Caring for children and adolescents can be challenging, especially when it comes to shaping their behavior in a healthy, constructive manner. While discipline is an essential part of parenting, the methods used can greatly influence a child's development. Rather than relying on disciplinary measures, better outcomes are supported by the idea that positive behavior reinforcement is not only more effective but also beneficial for long-term emotional and psychological well-being.



Behavior is the most common way children tend to communicate. When children and adolescents act out or behave in ways that seem disruptive, it is often a reflection of unmet needs, confusion, or emotional distress.

By reframing behavior as communication, caregivers can approach the issue with empathy rather than frustration, enabling them to address the root cause of the behavior, rather than the symptoms.

Positive Reinforcement: A Reward-Based System

Positive reinforcement is one of the most effective ways to change behavior. This method involves recognizing and rewarding positive behaviors, thereby encouraging their repetition. The key is to make the rewards meaningful to the child, whether its praise, extra playtime, or even something small like a sticker or token they can collect.

Positive reinforcement works because it taps into the desire for acknowledgment and appreciation. Create a reward chart for younger children. For older adolescents, consider discussing what rewards they value, ensuring they feel a sense of control over their progress. Acknowledging their efforts, not just outcomes, fosters their motivation.

Consistent Boundaries and Clear Expectations

Children thrive on consistency. Setting clear, consistent boundaries helps them understand what is expected of them. When expectations shift frequently, it creates confusion, leading to increased frustration and potentially negative behaviors.

Consistency doesn't have to be rigid, but it should be fair and transparent. For adolescents, this involves open communication. They should understand not only the rules but also the reasoning behind them. Being consistent doesn't mean being inflexible, but it ensures that children know

where the lines are drawn. Set and discuss family rules as a group, allowing children and teenagers to provide input. When everyone has a say, there is a greater sense of ownership over those boundaries.

Model the Behavior You Want to See

Children and teens often mimic the behaviors they observe in adults around them. Demonstrating positive communication, patience, and conflict resolution teaches children how to handle similar situations in their own lives. Parents and caregivers should model the behavior they wish to see in their children, whether that is respect, empathy, or accountability. Remember

to make a conscious effort to practice positive communication at home. When adults make a mistake or react poorly, and own up to it, this teaches children that it is okay to make mistakes and that taking responsibility is part of growing up.

Focus on Problem-Solving, Not Punishment

When a child or adolescent engages in negative behavior, focusing on punishment often misses the opportunity for growth. Instead, focus on problem solving. Ask questions like, "What happened?" and "How can we fix it?" This encourages children to take ownership of their actions and think critically about how to improve in the future.

Punishments that shame or belittle often lead to resentment and do little to change future behavior. Instead, collaborative problem solving fosters a growth mindset and instills a sense of responsibility. Next time a conflict arises, hold a family meeting or a one-on-one discussion with the child. Collaborate on a solution that feels fair and gives them an active role in resolving the issue.

Changing behavior in children and adolescents takes time, patience, and commitment. By using these techniques, caregivers can guide children towards healthier, more positive behaviors while fostering resilience and self-awareness. These approaches are not about quick fixes but about nurturing lasting growth that equips children with the tools they need for a successful future.

Breakfast with Santa

Breakfast with Santa 2024 is fast approaching! This year's event is scheduled to occur on Saturday, December 14. Please be on the lookout for the invitation in the mail. RSVP is required. We can't wait to see you there!

Capacity and Placement

As a reminder, we would like to discuss the importance of capacity and placement as it relates to placing foster youth in a resource family home. The desire to increase the capacity of your approval in order in care for more children is commendable, but this is a decision that requires careful consideration.

Resource Family Approval (RFA) social workers are tasked with ensuring your physical home and your family's dynamic structure is equipped to care for multiple foster youth.

There are many factors to consider, including but not limited to:

- Physical space—each foster youth having their own personal space and bed. This would also include vehicle space if the child requires a car seat.
- The training or ability to get training for a foster youth with special needs (medical, developmental and behavioral).
- Time and dedication—foster youth have visitations with their birth parents, medical appointments, therapy or school-related events.



Consideration is given to the number of children a caregiver is capable of providing care and supervision of.

It is also significant to note the importance of matching foster youth to resource parents in order to minimize the number of placements the foster youth may have.

As resource parents, you are encouraged to ask questions about a potential foster youth's visitation schedule, any ongoing appointments and other activities that they are involved with when considering placement.

While we know our resource parents' hearts are big, we do not want to place too many children in a given resource family home and overwhelm the caregiver, risking the possibility of a placement change.

If you are considering increasing your capacity, have a conversation with your RFA social worker and take the time to think on this decision. It's not about the quantity of care, but the quality of care that you give.

Caregiving Together

Bakersfield College (BC) would like to remind Kern resource parents about their monthly support group called Caregiving Together. This support group meeting is for all resource parents in Kern County, this includes resource parents, relative caregivers and Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFM) caregivers. BC is also happy to announce that groups are now back in person at the Department of Human Services' Columbus office (3711 Columbus St. Bakersfield, CA 93306).

The Spanish-speaking group meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month and the English-speaking group meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Groups are held from 6PM to 7:30PM. Caregivers will have an opportunity to support one another and to exchange ideas with each other. Every month there is a different topic and each caregiver will receive a one-hour training certificate for attending each meeting.

During meetings, resource parents have the opportunity to provide input and ask questions to the group. This is a great way for resource parents to support one another! Other activities include games like jeopardy and bingo to give a fun spin on the topics being discussed during the group meeting.

Pizza is served during each meeting and resource parents have the chance to win a prize through the interactive games. BC hosts these meetings to also provide caregivers with 1 hour of training credit that counts towards annual training hours.

Bakersfield College is encouraging all resource families to participate in Caregiving Together. To register for the group, please call 661-395-4991 or email bcfkce@bakersfieldcollege.edu.

Hop Skip Drive-Update

In the last issue of the magazine, we introduced the Hop Skip Drive Program, a rideshare service to help get foster youth to and from school. Hop Skip Drive is a great resource to ensure that youth safely get to school and can continue their daily routine with as little interruption as possible to their education. If caregivers are unable to secure transportation for the youth, they should contact the school and school district. Should the school district be unable to meet the transportation needs, a referral for Hop Skip Drive will be sent to the Department to organize the rideshare.

It is important that the caregiver communicate any school transportation challenges with the youth's school and primary social worker. Hop Skip Drive is here to help not only keep the youth in their school of origin but to maintain consistency to their education and learning. To learn more about Hop Skip Drive, you can visit <https://news.kern.org/2024/08/hopskipdrive-provides-transportation-services-for-bakersfields-most-vulnerable-students/>

Safe Surrender

Kern County is celebrating a monumental occasion! Over 100 babies have been safely surrendered! This means that over 100 babies have been placed with loving families and have found their forever home! As we celebrate such a success, it also brings to light the many foster youth in care that are just as deserving of the same loving homes.

In Kern County, a majority of our foster youth have been in multiple placements and are in need of that one caring adult that will not give up on them.

One of our most vulnerable groups of foster youth are teenagers and youth with special needs who are just as deserving of supportive, caring adults in their lives.

If you would like to be considered for placement of older youth, youth with special needs or sibling groups (if certain requirements are met), please contact your Resource Family Approval social worker and discuss the options and requirements.

Reporting Reminder

As mandated reporters, caregivers may find themselves in situations in which it is required to report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child.

There is a form (Suspected Child Abuse Report or SCAR) that caregivers are required to complete and file with Child Protective Services, but before doing that, caregivers should immediately call in the information to our Hotline.

Often, more information is needed then what is asked on the SCAR and most importantly, it is state law to call in the report AND submit a SCAR form within 36 hours of receiving information concerning the incident.

Please note that a SCAR is separate from the Unusual Incident Report form, which is required to be submitted to the child's primary social worker

and the resource parents' assigned Resource Family Approval worker within 24 hours or the next business day.

To contact the Hotline, please call (661) 631-6011; press one for English and two for mandated reporter.

Please note that even if you are unsure if a situation should be reported, it is important to just call into the Hotline.

Our phone room staff will determine if it meets the State requirements.

When completing the SCAR form, please list the name of the staff member you spoke with when you called the Hotline in section B. This will provide quicker processing of the SCAR.

SCARs can be securely emailed to cpshotline@kerndhs.com or faxed to (661) 631-6568.



KERN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

100 E. California Ave., Bakersfield, Ca. 93307

PO Box 511, Bakersfield, Ca. 93302

Recruitment Phone (661) 631-6204

Resourcefamilies@kerndhs.com

Fax (661) 633-7077

www.co.kern.ca.us/dhs/FosterFamilyResources/