

*If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, please contact Pam Townsend at 661-873-2339 and her email is townsep@kerndhs.com or Melissa Soin at: (661) 873-2382 or email soinm@kerndhs.com.*

## Ombudsman Corner

As the Ombudsman for the Kern County Department of Human Services, I'd like to take a brief moment to talk about the subject of bullying. Bullying can be expressed physically, such as, tripping, shoving, hitting, or taking someone's belongings; verbally, such as, name calling, threats or taunting; and socially, such as, exclusion, spreading rumors or public ridicule. Bullying can also happen via social media, known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the threatening, humiliation or harassment of a child of any age up to 18 years via use of technology. Cyberbullying is very harmful and can be dangerous. According to Stomp Out Bullying, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in children and teens using digital platforms for not just personal use, but for educational purposes as well. Those prone to bullying are more likely to be cyberbullied due to the increased use of smart phones and social media.



According to the National Education Center, in 2016, one out of five students reported being bullied. Children may not readily report bullying and signs that your child may be experiencing bullying, include, reluctance to go to school, increased/decreased appetite, general worrying or sadness. Organizations such as, Community-Matters.org and StompOutBullying.org offer the following suggestions if your child is being bullied:

- Learn about the issue and learn about the Internet – the more informed you are the more effective you can be in affecting the problem.
- Walk the talk – By modeling empathy, tolerance and respect in your actions and communication, you impart these values, and influence the attitudes and behaviors of your children. Explain that cyberbullying is harmful and unacceptable. Discuss appropriate online behavior.
- Listen without anger and judgement – Establish a safe space, so that they will feel comfortable turning to you in the future.
- Monitor your child online – Cyberbullying is the fastest growing type of peer-on-peer mistreatment today. Keep your home computer out in the open, such as a family room or kitchen.
- Understand your school's policies – Rules, procedures and policies regarding bullying vary greatly from district to district. Speak with school officials and your school board about what policies they have in place and what programs they have implemented to address bullying and cyberbullying.

Working together can make a tremendous difference in a child's life.

# Melissa's Message

## Tips for Preparing for Reunification

In a majority of foster care cases, the goal is to reunify the child with their biological parents and to help succeed in that goal; resource parents have to be on board in supporting that outcome. It is in the child's best interest when they can safely returned to the care of their parents, but having understood that does not make it any easier for the resource family that so lovingly cared for that child. Saying goodbye can be difficult and blog. adoptuskids.org has compiled six tips to help resource families make that transition.



1. Maintain contact with the social worker about the permanency plan that the child is on. Understand that these plans can change suddenly and when appropriate, be involved in the permanency plan.
2. Help the child prepare. Reunification is also a big step for the foster child. Resource parents can put together life books of milestones, photos, report cards and other positive memories that the child has made while in their home.
3. Reunification does not always mean the end of a relationship. The role a resource family has played in a foster child's life does not have to end when the child moves back home. Many foster child and their resource families remain in contact and continue to build a caring, mentor-like relationship. Collaboration with the resource family and the biological family could aid in continued success for the reunification process.
4. Resource parents should take time to feel the loss/absence of the foster youth. This type of grief is a natural process in fostering children and it is important for the resource family to consider taking time for themselves before taking another placement.
5. Creating support. There are many aspects of fostering that a resource parent tackles and it is important to have a support network such as other resource parents who can relate.
6. Most importantly, know that you have made a difference. The love and care that resource parents give to foster children can play a huge part in a child's later success.

For resource parents who are seeking a support network, Bakersfield College has created the Caregiving Together: A Virtual Support Group. This is an online Zoom platform based interactive meeting where resource parents connect and discuss important foster care topics. To receive more information, contact Bakersfield College at 661-395-4991.

## Pre-Contact Questions for COVID-19

As COVID-19 cases have increased in Kern County, it is more important than ever to be accurate when answering the pre-screening questions when social workers are scheduling in-person contact with resource families and foster youth. The accuracy and transparency of the answers will aid in keeping everyone involved safe. It is required that social workers ask pre-screening COVID-19 questions before conducting any in-person contact with a resource family and/or foster youth. Below are examples of the questions resource families may be asked.

- Have you or anyone in your household been exposed to or been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19?
- Do you or anyone in your household have any symptoms of Covid-19 such as fever, muscle aches, cough, shortness of breath, new loss of taste or smell, fatigue, sore throat, etc.?
- Do you, anyone in your household or anyone you have been in recent contact with have any Covid-19 tests pending?

Placement stability remains a priority and resource families' cooperation helps ensure the safety, health and physical well-being of themselves, staff and foster youth.

## *COVID-19 Testing for Foster Youth Entering the Jamison Center*

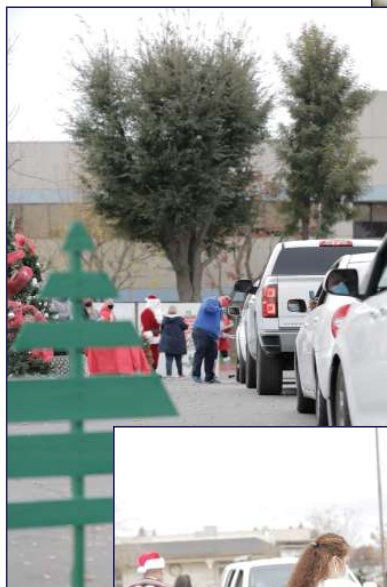
On January 6, 2021, Supervising Judge of the Kern County Juvenile Court Susan M. Gill signed an order that all foster children who initially enter or return (due to placement change) to the A. Miriam Jamison Children's Center are to test for COVID-19. This standing order is to protect the safety, health and physical well-being of the minors who are being temporarily placed at the Jamison Center. Should a child test positive for COVID-19, the Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) will ensure that the child and those who have prolonged contact with them are isolated in an appropriate setting for the adequate timeframe to limit the spread to others. If resource parents need assistance arranging a test for COVID-19 for a child being moved to the Jamison Center from their home, they can contact the staff at the Jamison Center (661) 334-3500 who will assist in establishing a COVID-19 test appointment at the Kern Medical Sagebrush Plaza located at 1111 Columbus St. Bakersfield, CA 93305. The most appropriate time to have the test complete is the day prior to or the day of placement at Jamison Center.

## *Kudos Korner*

Mr. and Mrs. A. were introduced to foster care when they had to apply for emergency placement of their own grandchild a few years ago. The experience was so positive and transformative; it inspired them to open their home to other children in need of a loving and nurturing home. Mrs. A. shared that her journey through the foster care system made her more empathetic towards the families they encountered during placements. It also reinforced their desire to do everything they can to help children reunify with their parents. During a recent Child and Family Team Meeting, Mrs. A. assured a distressed grandparent that she would supply her grandchildren with all the hugs and cuddles she can muster until the children can safely return home. The kind words did not only comfort the family in attendance but also allowed them to relax, listen and trust in the process. Mr. and Mrs. A. have opened their home to children of all different ages and backgrounds. Their passion and commitment to provide a safe, loving, and nurturing home simply reflects in the way they continually strive to go above and beyond to meet all the children's needs.

## *Breakfast with Santa 2020*

The Kern County Department of Human Services' (KCDHS) Breakfast with Santa event for 2020 was reinterpreted to provide foster children with gifts and holiday cheer but in a safe and socially distanced way. Eighty-three resource families and three hundred and twenty-six children took part in our drive thru event hosted at the KCDHS parking lot on December 12, 2020. The lot was decorated with Christmas trees, candy canes and all the festive colors of the season. Resource families were provided a hot breakfast, treat bags, snacks, a gift for every child in the home and, for randomly selected resource parents, a raffle prize! Santa was also there to give good cheer to all the families and hand out candy canes to all the boys and girls. KCDHS would like to thank Lowes, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Target and the Kern Partnership for Children and Families for their generous donations to the event. Another "thank you" goes out to all our resource families who participated and made 2020's Breakfast with Santa such a wonderful event. We look forward to seeing you all at Breakfast with Santa 2021!





# What to Ask When Accepting Placement

Every foster youth has their own unique circumstances as they enter into foster care and it is important for resource families to have important information regarding the care and comfort of each child. Having this information will help the youth's social worker and the resource family themselves determine if they are a good fit to care for a particular foster child. From [blog.adoptuskids.org](http://blog.adoptuskids.org), below are some examples of questions that resource families are encouraged to ask when considering placement of a foster youth.

## What are the ages and sex of the children?

- This will aid in figuring out any sleeping arrangements should the foster youth be placed.

## Why have the children come into care?

- All foster youth are brought into care because they were abused or neglected in some way. Resource parents are not given the details of a case due to confidentiality of the biological parents. However, if a foster youth has experienced sexual abuse, social workers will discuss that matter as it could affect the safety of any other children in the home.

## Is the child part of a sibling group in care?

- Knowing if a foster youth has siblings also in care can provide you with an idea of possible visitation arrangements later on.

## Is my home located within their school district?

- Placing a foster youth within their school of origin is an important factor as it helps the child maintain a sense of familiarity and normalcy even when being separated from their home. This question also gives a resource parent a sense of time commitment if the youth has to be enrolled at a new school.

## Does the child have allergies-including to animals?

- Family pets are often overlooked when considering a placement. It is important to know if the child has any allergic reactions to animals and to know if the child is comfortable around animals.

## What is the child's food preferences?

- Having food that is familiar to the child can help with the moving transition and help them feel secure in a new environment. It is important to note that agency staff may not always know this information, especially if it is the child's initial placement.

## What does the visitation schedule look like/what routine appointments does the child have?

- If there is a schedule already set for visits or if the child has established appointments for any services they are receiving, a potential resource family will need to determine if they can accommodate the appointment into their own schedules.

## Are there any medical needs?

- For the safety and well-being of any foster youth, it is vital that the resource parents are equipped with the knowledge of the particular needs of that child. The child's healthcare professionals or public health nurse can train resource parents in caring for the specific needs, but it is for resource families to determine whether they are able to handle all that comes with caring for a medically fragile or special needs child.

The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) has created an information sheet called Pre-Placement and Time of Placement Questions that can assist in the decision-making placement process. To receive a copy, please contact your assigned RFA social worker or email Melissa Soin at [soinm@kerndhs.com](mailto:soinm@kerndhs.com).



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