

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

Caregiver's Rights to Access Current and Most Recent Education Records

Did you know that caregivers who are not the holder of educational rights now have access to a youth's education records? The passage of Senate Bill (SB) 233 authorizes caregiver access to education records of youth in foster care, including resource parents, relatives caring for the child, tribally approved homes, foster family agencies (FFAs) and Short-Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP) staff, even if they are not the child's education rights holder. This is awesome news, as it allows you, the caregiver to stay informed of the child's progress and to be supportive of the day-to-day needs for them to succeed educationally. Per All County Letter 21-86 the following changes have been made:

- Requires a school district to permit access to student records by a Foster Family Agency with placement of a student who is currently or formerly enrolled in the school district, a Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program staff responsible for the education or case management of a student, and a caregiver who has direct responsibility for the care of the student, including an approved or licensed foster parent, and approved relative or non-related extended family member, or a resource family;
- Expands access to student records to include current or most recent records, grades, transcripts, attendance, discipline, online communication, special education assessments, and an individualized education program or 504 plan; and
- Establishes the right and obligation of the caregiver to access and maintain education information about the child, regardless of whether the caregiver has been appointed as the student's educational rights holder.

For more information regarding caregiver and training requirements associated with SB 233 please visit <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/letters-and-notices/all-county-letters/2021-all-county-letters> or contact the Resource Family Approval Division at (661) 631-6300.



Confidentiality & Social Media

Please be mindful of information that is shared regarding foster youth, especially when connecting with others on social media. Any personal information or photos of a foster youth are not permitted to be placed online as they are confidential. It is our responsibility as professionals and caregivers to protect the best interests of these children. While you are caring for a foster youth and want to include them as much as possible into the fold of your family and life, please refrain from posting photos online that have them in it. One alternative is to instead, print the photos and create a photo album or scrapbook or even frame the photos and display them in your home. However, if a foster youth would like to post photos online that they are in; it is within their right to do so using their own social media accounts.

The Kern County Department of Human Services (KCDHS) recognizes that resource families have created their own support community in the form of online groups and understand that these groups help share advice and other helpful information about caring for foster youth. When participating within these online groups, please do not discuss specific information about a foster youth's case, their biological parents or any other case sensitive information. Any questions or concerns about the case should be discussed with the foster youth's primary social worker.

Please treat all information regarding a foster youth as sensitive and confidential. The experiences and stories behind the reasons why a child was placed in foster care are extremely private and foster youth and their biological families are entrusting us to respect those boundaries of confidentiality.

Melissa's Message

Holidays & Foster Care

The holidays are a special time of year filled with family traditions and wonderful memories; however, it can be hard for our foster youth because they had been separated from the things that make the holidays special to them. Foster youth can feel conflicted about celebrating the holidays with a new family and they often report feeling vulnerable and lonely during this time of year. Every child deserves to have a magical holiday season created by beautiful memories that remind them how loved they are.



As resource families, there are some ways in which you can help these youth feel supported. Prepare the foster youth for how your family celebrates the holidays. This will help with the transition of incorporating them into the family and allow them to choose what activities they would like to participate in. Ask the youth what activities they enjoy doing during the holidays and incorporate them into your home. If your holiday activities include family gatherings with relatives that the foster youth has not met, share photos with the foster youth and tell them a bit about each relative who will be visiting. You should also ask the youth how they would like to be introduced and if they will want a "signal" of some kind to indicate feeling uncomfortable or overwhelmed.

Keeping foster youth connected to their friends and family can help ease the difficulty of being physically separated. If it is appropriate, allow the youth to call/video chat with loved ones and encourage them to make cards or gifts for their family members. By helping the youth maintain a connection with their family, they will worry less about how their family is coping by being away and therefore, lessen any stress related behaviors.

Lastly, understand if the youth pulls away. Every foster youth's experiences are different and for some, no matter your best efforts, they may only be able to endure so much. Give youth time for themselves and ask them what they need from you. Some youth may need to keep their minds busy and it would be beneficial to have solo activities like coloring, drawing, puzzles, activity books on hand. Methods of coping often vary with every child and it is important to provide support around their individual needs.

Let us make this year's holiday season the best for Kern foster youth!


Tools for Adoptive Families on Parenting

Childwelfare.gov has created factsheets for resource parents in helping them understand the impact of adoption on their adoptive youth's development and provide practical strategies to build and maintain the relationship between parent and child. The factsheets are provided for three developmental stages: preschoolers, school-aged child and teenagers.

Each factsheet covers information about:

- Adoption and child development
- Behavioral and mental health concerns
- Discipline considerations/effective discipline
- Talking openly about adoption
- Additional resources

These factsheets are free on the [childwelfare.gov](https://www.childwelfare.gov) site and are a great resource to have if you have adopted a child or are in the process of adopting. Permanency for every foster youth is what we all strive for and having effective tools to understanding a youth's experiences, even after being adopted, can only help to strengthen the foundation of love and support that you as caregivers continually give. To obtain your free copy of these factsheets, please visit https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preschool/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=adoptiveparentingresources071421.



FACTSHEETS FOR FAMILIES | OCTOBER 2020


Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler


Children ages 3 to 5 are limited in how much they can understand about adoption. Like all young children, adopted children are naturally curious and may ask many questions. They are also growing and changing rapidly. As their abilities develop, so will their understanding of their place in their families and communities. These early years are a good time for you to start talking about adoption in a positive and relaxed manner. Beginning this practice sooner rather than later will help set the stage for open communication and healthy development as your child grows.

This factsheet is designed to help you understand the impact of adoption on your preschooler's development and provide practical strategies to build a warm and loving relationship with your child based on honesty and trust. This factsheet can serve as a reference during your child's preschool years.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Adoption and child development
- Behavioral and mental health concerns
- Discipline considerations
- Talking openly about adoption
- Additional resources
- Conclusion

 Child Welfare Information Gateway
RESPECTING CHILDREN • PROMOTING SUCCESS

 Children's Bureau
An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

Children's Bureau/ACYF/ACF/HHS | 800.394.3366 | Email: info@childwelfare.gov | <https://www.childwelfare.gov> 1

2021 National Adoption Day

In 1976, Governor Dukakis of Massachusetts announced Adoption Week to promote awareness of the need for adoptive families for children in foster care. In 1984, President Regan proclaimed the first National Adoption Week. In 1995, President Clinton expanded the Adoption Awareness Week to the entire month of November.

The Kern County Department of Human Services, along with our many community partners, began celebrating National Adoption Day in 2003. Since that time, we have witnessed hundreds of children find their forever families. The day is a collaborative effort that includes beautifully decorated courtrooms providing photo opportunities and memories for families adopting.

After the adoption hearing is concluded, families are invited to join an outdoor carnival setting that is a feast



for the eyes. This year, families will be treated to a taco truck with multiple meat options along with beans and rice, a funnel cake/donut truck, a Build-a-Bear station, and a photo booth. Siblings of adopted children can build their own birdhouse with the help from DHS staff. Partnering agencies will provide their own unique interactive family games as well as post-adoption support information.

Overall, we hope families leave with a great memory of the day their adoption was finalized and their family became better because they added a deserving child into their home.

Online Tutoring with iFoster

iFoster has partnered with Learn to Be—a national nonprofit that provides individualized virtual tutoring in any subject for kindergarten through 12th grade students. One hour weekly sessions are provided for every student and more sessions can be added if there is a need and availability. The best part about this FREE online tutoring is that it is available for as long as the student requires it. On average, students utilizing Learn to Be tutoring services for 8 months and have seen their grade point average (GPA) increase by 1.6.

In order to access this free tutoring through Learn to Be, please sign up to be an iFoster member. Membership is free and to sign up, please visit ifoster.org or you can download the iFoster app through the Google Play Store. Once you become a member, simply log in, click on “search all resources,” click on “k-12 Education” and click on “Learn to Be.” From there, you will be able to access the enrollment form. After submitting the form, a tutor will email you within a week’s time to schedule a meeting.

Learn to Be is a great resource for students and their caregivers. Every child is unique, especially with how they process and learn new information. With 5,000 vetted and experienced tutors, Learn to Be can provide unique and individualized tutoring that your youth may need. To learn more information, visit www.ifoster.org.

At Risk Youth Need You

You may have heard the acronym CSEC by now, but just in case you have not, it stands for Commercially, Sexually Exploited Children. California has emerged as a magnet for sex trafficking and exploitation of children. Identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, three of the nation’s thirteen high intensity locations for child prostitution are Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego Metropolitan. These large cities are close neighbors to Kern County and therefore affect us greatly when it comes to youth being at risk of being trafficked/exploited.

When youth are removed from the trafficked life and brought into foster care, social workers diligently work to locate families who have a different perspective. A perspective that allows one to look at the youths’ situation and realize what they have been through without judgement and criticism. For example, if a youth who has experienced trafficking returns to your home past curfew, instead of saying, “Where have you been,” you might say, “are you hungry? Can I help you get your clothes washed?” Using this type of perspective, will show the youth you are there to help them, not to shame or judge them for any of their actions. Having a listening ear and patience can make a huge difference. If you are interested in learning more about how you can open your heart and home to youth at risk, contact your RFA social worker.

Pathway to Reunification

The Kern County Department of Human Services’ (KCDHS) public website has a new page! Pathway to Reunification is designed to provide information and resources for our families who are working toward reunification and assist our social workers with sharing this information with the families they work with. This new page is also beneficial for our resource families as it shares in detail, the various aspects of Child Protective Services (CPS), the court processes and other resources to help strengthen and support our families. As an integral part of the child and family team, resource families are encouraged to learn as much as possible about the foster system and how we all can work together in supporting families! To learn more about the Pathway to Reunification Webpage, please visit <https://www.kcdhs.org/resources/pathway-to-reunification>



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