

If you are interested in submitting an article for upcoming newsletters, or have suggestions on improving the newsletter, contact Emily Stewart at steware@kerndhs.com or (661) 873-2303

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Ombudsman Corner

Did you know that May is National Water Safety Month? In June of 2003, the World Water Park Association launched National Water Safety Week, which later became National Water Safety Month in 2006. The World Park Association, along with the Association of Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, The National Recreation & Park Association, and the American Red Cross formed a coalition whose purpose is to promote national water safety through educational programs, public service announcements and easy to access water safety materials. According to the California Department of Developmental Services, “in California, drowning is a leading cause of injury-related deaths among children under the age of five. Each year, near-drowning incidents result in life-long disabilities.”

With warmer weather and summertime approaching, the lure of a day at the beach or an afternoon in the pool sounds very enticing and are great activities for family fun. Your knowledge of water safety may save a child from death or a life-long disability. Below are some tips to stay safe around water:

- Never leave a child unattended in or near water.
- Teach children how to swim.
- Install alarms on house doors and around pool areas.
- Keep a constant eye on children in or near water, including bathtubs, buckets, toilets, ponds, spas, and pools.
- Incorporate layers of protection, which may include, but are limited to adult supervision, fences, gates, latches, compliant drain covers for pools/spas, education, throwing aids and rescue techniques.
- Designate an adult to be close enough to reach and touch the child.

For more information on water safety, you may visit www.dds.ca.gov/drowning or www.drowningpreventionfoundation.org.

Melissa's Message

Tips for Keeping Teens Safe

As prom and graduation season begins, celebrations and parties are inevitable. It is important to understand the risky activities that teens can be exposed to. While we want our teens to have fun and enjoy significant milestones like prom and graduation, we also want to ensure their safety when it comes to underage drinking, drugs and sexual activity.

Having conversations with our teens about these risky behaviors is a good place to start. We all know a story or two about a teen who made an unsafe choice in the midst of having fun and ended up suffering the consequences later on. Emphasize that anyone can be placed into unsafe situations, but it is the choices we make that determine the kind of path we set our lives on.

Here are some helpful tips to help guide conversations with teens

- Find out where the party/prom will be and for how long your teen will be there.
- Find out if there will be any adult supervision at the event.
- Discuss the possibility of alcohol being involved and explain that underage drinking is illegal, dangerous and the consequences of your teen engaging in it.
- Offer to host a party or celebration event in lieu of your teen going somewhere you feel is unsafe.
- Have open conversations about safe sex and help establish a plan should the teen feel uncomfortable/unsafe in a situation.
- Talk with your teen about the possibility of drugs being present and explain your rules and expectations of being responsible.
- Discuss transportation plans and what to do in the event it is unsafe to drive or to ride with an intoxicated driver.

Keeping honest and open communication with your teen can help keep them safe in unsupervised situations. It also promotes a sense of responsibility, as they already know the consequences involved with any risky behaviors. Lastly, make sure your teen knows that, no matter what, you will be there to support and care for them. Mistakes can be made even with the best of intentions and it is important to help your teen through their transition into young adulthood. For more tips on teen safety around prom and graduation, please visit <https://cadyinc.org/resources/get-the-facts/keep-your-child-safe-around-prom-and-graduation-time/>.



To All Dads and Moms

During the months of May and June, we celebrate you Moms and Dads! We celebrate your unwavering love and support. We celebrate your tireless dedication to your family. We celebrate your seemingly never-ending patience. We celebrate the glue that keeps a family together!

As resource parents, you play a unique role in caring for children who may not be biologically yours, yet you nevertheless care for like your own. It is because of your compassion and motivation that Kern County Foster Youth have a safe place to go when their lives face difficulties. Resource Parent Moms and Dads of Kern County, Thank you for all you do!

“One of the greatest titles in the world is parent, and one of the biggest blessings in the world is to have parents to call mom and dad.”

Getting to Know ISFC

By Tony Robertson-RFA Administration Coordinator

In this month's edition of Getting to Know Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC), we are going to focus on how the County of Kern is attempting to broach the many complex needs obstacles faced by ISFC resource parents when accepting placement of an emotional/behavioral challenged youth. The youth range in age from seven to seventeen, with emotional/behavioral issues such as; aggressive, assaultive behavior, disrespectful etc. ISFC is a state licensed service model for eligible children whose needs for safety, permanency, and well-being require specially trained resource parents to address these aforementioned examples.

Currently, Kern County has over 1,000 approved resource families, with many who are potentially eligible to care for youth with complex needs. While this is an outstanding achievement, we need families willing to take placement of complex needs youth and participate in ISFC. The ISFC program goals aim to achieve the following:

1. Maintain child/youth/NMD in the home of a relative or non-related extended family member by providing a high level of support services and increased financial support to the family.
2. Increase the ability to step children down from congregate care by providing a larger pool of caretakers trained in the Intensive Services modality to allow for "best matched" placements, including relative or non-relative extended family member homes.
3. Prevent child/youth from entering into congregate care by stabilizing behaviors in an Intensive Services setting.
4. Offer all resource families the same opportunity to receive intensive

supportive services, regardless of their individual oversight agency (County resource family or FFA resource family).

To implement the goals of ensuring ISFC resource parents receive appropriate training, the County of Kern has collaborated with community agencies and contracted with a Foster Family Agency that has a state approved ISFC program statement. It is our hope that ISFC resource parents realize having such an extensive support system can lessen the burden and comfort them in the challenges they will face in caring for complex needs youth in the ISFC program. The benefit of becoming an ISFC resource parent, in conjunction with elevated status of "professional" parent, is that once certified, you will receive a higher rate of pay to enable caregivers to support intensive services for youth placed in their home. However, this is minimal compared to the reward of being the positive role model and helping to change the life of a foster youth.

In partnership with Bakersfield College Foster and Kinship Care Program (BC FKCE), Kern resource families are able to access a variety of trainings focused on caring for youth with complex needs. Please see below for some of the training classes available.

- Resilience Documentary: May 4, 6-8 p.m.
- Suicide Prevention: May 19, 6-8 p.m.
- The Whole Brain Child by Dan Siegel: May 21, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
- Understanding Children's Mental Health Challenges: June 16, 6-8 p.m.

For more information or to sign up for a class, call the BC FKCE Registration Line at (661)-395-4991.

Planning a Vacation

As summertime approaches, many families look forward to planning summer activities and vacations. It is highly encouraged that foster youth be included in family vacations and activities as this promotes bonding with the youth and the family as well as demonstrates to the youth that they are loved and supported. For many foster youth, summer vacations may be a novel concept to which they have never experienced. This is a great way to share new experiences and create lasting memories. Making vacation plans can be a process and including foster youth in those plans will add a few more tasks to that list.

When making travel plans, please remember that children under the court's supervision (dependent children) must be pre-approved for travel by the child's assigned social worker. If you are planning to go out-of-state, a court order must be obtained in advance of your trip. Please talk to your social worker as soon as possible regarding any travel plans. If you are planning to leave a dependent child with an alternate caregiver while you are away please let your social worker know as soon as possible. When the child will remain in your home with a non-licensed caregiver, there are specific background check criteria that must be completed, such as fingerprinting before approval can be granted. An alternate caregiver, outside of your home, cannot care for dependent children for more than 72 hours without it being considered a placement change.

Please contact the foster youth's assigned social worker for more information.

Level of Care Reminder

As a reminder, Level of Care (LOC) is extended to include all foster youth and non-minor dependent (NMD) placements in approved resource family homes. The LOC rate is the reimbursement amount paid to a resource family for each foster youth in that home. LOC is a strength-based method designed to determine the individual care needs of each youth as well as the extent to which resource parents are willing and able to meet those needs. As a part of the Continuum of Care reform legislation, LOC's intent is to regulate the rating system and decrease the use of non-family based environment settings such as group homes. LOC rates range from the basic rate to an intensive care rate. A determination will be made on the LOC rate based on the foster youth's needs and what steps the resource parent will take in meeting those needs. Please note that a review of the LOC rate does not guarantee a change in rate.

To be considered for a LOC determination one of the following circumstances must occur:

- Change in placement
- Triggering event which expresses the care needs of the foster youth have changed
- Resource parent request to review the LOC rate made in writing to the foster youth's/NMD's primary social worker
 - o Information to include in the request:
 - Foster youth/NMD's name
 - Date of request
 - Supporting information and reasons for requesting a LOC redetermination

Resource parents can support LOC rate determinations by communicating with the primary social worker about the foster youth/NMD's specialized needs and how those needs are met in the home. Being an active part in Child and Family Team Meetings and completing LOC report documents as requested by the primary social worker will also help support a rate determination.

For questions related to Level of Care, contact the foster youth's/NMD's primary social worker.



Are you a caregiver of a current or former foster youth?
Are you feeling frustrated? Would you like additional support?

FURS Hotline

Just a reminder that the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is available to resource families as well as current and former foster youth. This statewide hotline provides immediate, trauma-informed support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. If you are in need of additional support, call or text 1-833-939 FURS (3877) or go online to www.cal-furs.org.

Safe Sleep Reminders

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; 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
- Use a firm sleep surface (mattress) in a safety approved crib
- Do not keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads or soft toys in the baby's sleep area
- The crib must have the proper guard rails
- Infants can share an adult's room, but not their bed

For more information about safe sleep for babies, talk with the child's pediatrician. You can also visit <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/safesleep/index.html>.



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