FAMILY PATCHWORK

Shared Parenting: Supporting the Partnership of Birth & Foster Parents

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NFAPA was formed in 1999 to increase the amount of information, resources, and support available to Nebraska's resource families. We respond to the changing needs of foster care and adoption by offering an array of supportive services and programs. Foster and adoptive families, relatives or caregivers who share parenting with the birth family while seeking to find permanence, safety, and stability for the child. These individuals are willing to provide a permanent connection for the child whether or not the child reunifies with their birth family. They play an active role in linking the child to their past as well as guiding their futures.

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Our Statewide Family Run Organization for Children's Behavioral Health created by Youth and Families, for Youth and Families.

Employees and volunteers of the organizations are family members who understand the challenges and mentor other families experiencing some of these same struggles they themselves have faced. Recognizing that youth, parents and caregivers are the experts when it comes to their families needs, the Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is a network of advocacy, support, education, and resource referral designed to strengthen families and empower them as they become stronger advocates for their children.

Successful partnering Birth-Foster Parenting Goals for Project

- Meet with families as early as possible
- Build positive Relationship between birth and foster parent
- Statistics show increase in positive outcomes when positive relationship
- Build informal supports
- We will use practice based evidence (what works within our system in Nebraska)
- Identify foster families that believe in the philosophy
- No protocol for birth families
- Timely and successful reunification
- Long term collaboration
- Begin to change the negative Stigma, the perception of “foster families are bad” or “birth families are bad”

A family is like a Patchwork Quilt
Each member is a piece of the total design.
They fit together as the pattern is built
With each new-born addition that is added in time.

Each shape and color in the quilt is there
To add some interest and form.
Each person in the family is where
With God's design, they daily belong.

Just as the patchwork needs loving and care
And mending when ends are frayed.
So the family ties may need repair
With forgiveness and apologies made.

When a patch is worn out
and must be replaced
A new piece of cloth can
be sewn in its space.
But loved ones are so
precious, each one so
unique,
They're priceless
heirlooms we all want to
keep.
They can't be forgotten,
our memories of them
never end.
They're in our hearts
forever, we always call
them friend.

Though quilts are like our families, they're made by human hands.
Their colors fade, their fabric tears, they lose their great demand.
But families live forever, throughout time, across sea and land
For they are made by God alone through His eternal perfect plan

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What is shared parenting?

building and maintaining relationships and communication between birth and foster families involved in a youth's life, with the goal of supporting family reunification or another permanency plan.

one of the core philosophies of foster care families concentrates on the importance of family relationships in the treatment of children in care. While the foster family works with the foster child to develop positive changes, the biological family needs skills to support these changes and work on the family issues that initiated foster care.

The relationship between foster parents and biological families can have a significant impact on the overall course of placement and/or treatment. When the relationship is respectful, nonjudgmental, and supportive, all parents are able to do a better job in meeting the children's needs. Birth parents experience less anger, feelings of shame, or worry about the care their children are receiving. When the birth parents experience less anxiety, it provides them with more energy to focus on their own treatment issues.

when parents and foster parents work together, kids go home more quickly and stay home.

Kids in foster care also get better care when the parent and foster parent exchange information about the child and work together to make visits positive.

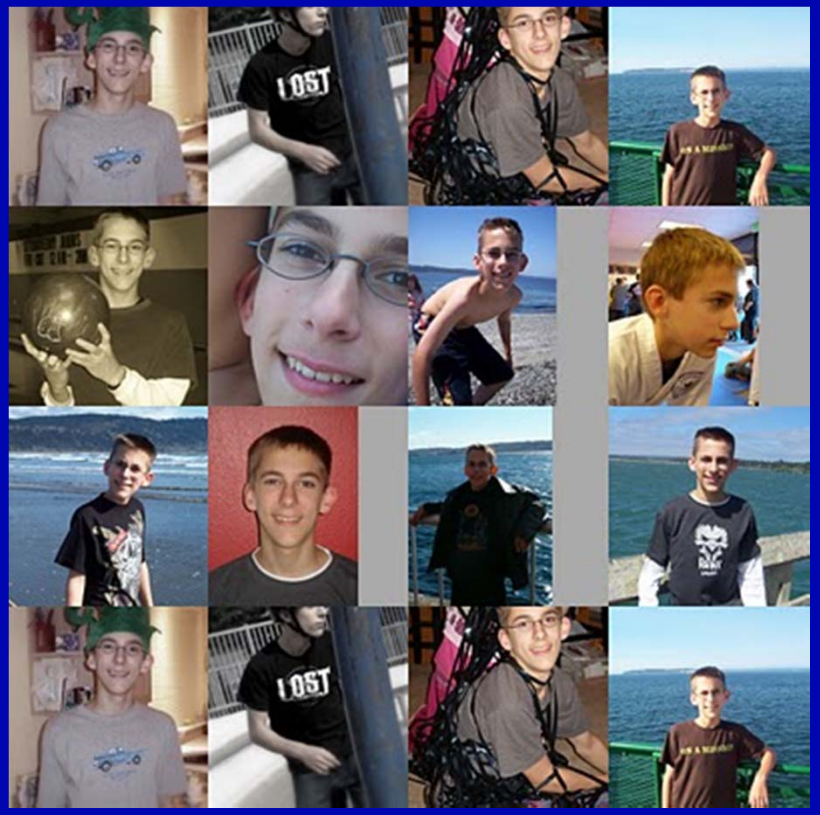
Kids also feel less worried about their families. Many kids are worried about loyalty—if they like the foster parent, does that mean they can't like their parent anymore? They feel better if they see the foster parent and parent getting along.

Reunification is also easier for the child if the relationship with the foster parent doesn't end, even if contact with the foster parent is just a birthday or Christmas card, a phone call, or occasional stopping by.

The foster parent can become an ongoing support to the parent after reunification, someone who is an expert about their child. When things are tough and the kid is acting goofy, the parent can call and say, "What do I to say, "This worked for me." That can help prevent the child from re-entering foster care.

I know I'm in my
own little world...
it's okay...
they know me here

NFAPA AND NE-FFCMH



In recent years, there has been a movement across the country to provide planned strategies, or “Ice Breaker Meetings,” for bringing foster families and birth families of children in care together. Public and private agencies have changed policies and protocols about contact between foster families and birth families; while revamping their training for foster parents and staff.

Ice Breaker Meetings allow foster parents to learn more about the children in their care; they feel less fear or anger toward the birth family and ultimately encourage more contact between the children and their biological family. As the result of a successful extended-family relationship, the foster parents are more likely to have contact with the child at the end of placement. Overall, the children benefit from Ice Breaker Meetings because there is less conflictand tension between the birth family and the foster family, there are reduced feelings of divided loyalty, there is a decreased sense of loss and abandonment, and there are reduced attempts at “splitting” the adults involved.Professionals benefit because there may be fewer relationship conflicts and the transition to permanence should proceed more smoothly.

Recently NFAPA and the Federation have been collaborating to develop a new pilot project to strengthen the partnership between Bio and Foster families

Ice Breaker Meetings:Communication Between Families

The term “Ice Breaker Meeting” is being used in many parts of the country to describe the initial structured meetings between birth parents and foster parents. An Ice Breaker is a facilitated, child-focused meeting held shortly after a child is placed

The meeting provides an opportunity

for foster parents and birth families to meet each other and to

share information about the needs of the child. The Ice Breaker is

the starting point for establishing communication and building a

relationship between families.

Foster Families are encouraged to share information about themselves and their family,

which will help to alleviate the anxiety of the birth family.

Such background information might include:

- reasons for becoming a foster parent
- how long the family has been providing foster care
- who else lives in the home
- assurances that the foster parents do not want to take the birth family's place
- basic structure/rules of the home
- daily routines
- the child's progress

Birth families are encouraged to tell the foster parents important things
about their child, such as:

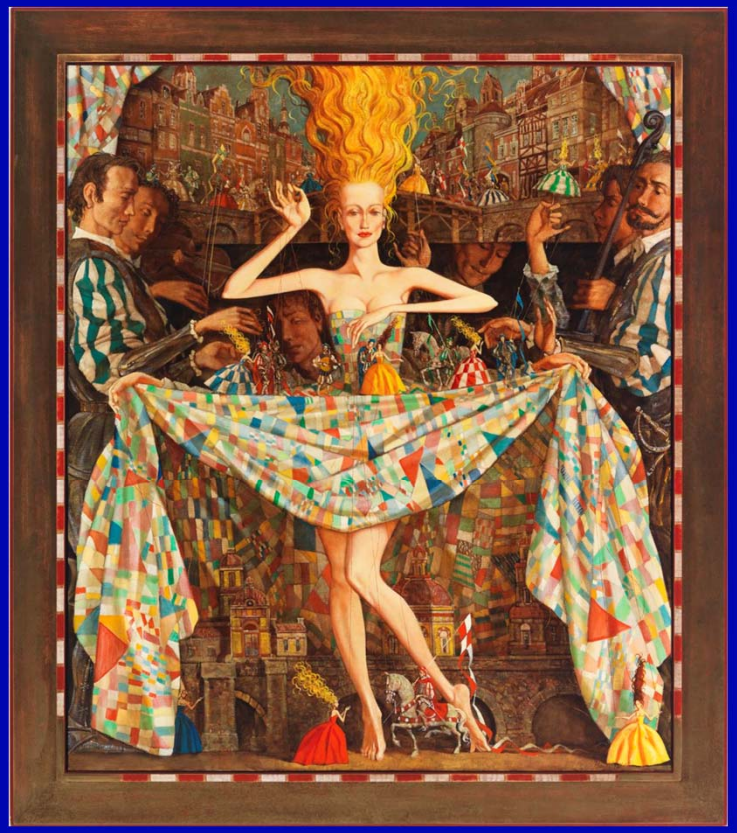
- medical concerns
- • allergies
- • the child's normal schedule or routine
- • important cultural or family traditions
- • items that may be important to the child
- • educational or behavioral concerns
- If the child is participating, he/she will be given the opportunity to ask
- questions or express concerns or desires.

Meetings Facilitated by NFAPA and NE-FFCMH

The meeting will be held at one of our offices or at another neutral location. The facilitator will ensure that introductions

are made, remind participants of the meeting's purpose, and help each participant get started. The facilitator needs to ensure that the meeting stays on track, to help the families maintain appropriate boundaries for a first contact, and to help structure a short-term plan for future contacts or visits. The meeting should be kept relatively short, usually less than 60 minutes. A follow-up evaluation will occur later in the course of treatment and/or placement.

Emphasis on ensuring birth family involvement for the children in foster care has been a part of many reviews, such as the Child and Family Service Reviews being done by the Children's Bureau of the U.S.Department of Health Human Services. Ice Breaker Meetings provide our treatment teams with a relatively simple way to highlight and begin the process of creating respectful and supportive relationships between the foster and biological families.



Thank You for your Time

THE PATCHWORK QUILT

Life isn't given to us all of a piece,
It's more like a patchwork quilt -
Each hour and minute a patch to fit in
To the pattern that's being built.
With some patches light - and some patches dark,
And some that seem ever so dull -
But if we were given to set some apart,
We'd hardly know which to cull.
For it takes the dark patches to set off the light,
And the dull to show up the gay -
And, somehow, the pattern just wouldn't be right
If we took any part away.
No, life isn't given us all of a piece,
But in patches of hours to use,
That each can work out his pattern of life
To whatever design he might choose.
~ Helen Lowrie Marshall ~