

# NEWS FROM YOUR PEER LIAISON

April 2017



## KELLI VERMEER

IFAPA Peer Liaison

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## I UNDERSTAND...

### I AM A FOSTER PARENT TOO

IFAPA recognizes that foster parents often need the perspective of peers during the foster parenting and adoption experience.

I can provide support and assist you with questions regarding:

- Licensing requirements
- Training needs
- Respite care
- Behavior challenges
- Working with birth families
- Confidentiality issues
- And much more!



www.ifapa.org

## Building Healthy Relationships with Foster Children

Forming healthy attachments is crucial in childhood – but this becomes extremely difficult for children who enter the foster care system. Constantly changing schools, homes, friends, and authority figures can leave children feeling disconnected, alone, and without guidance.

When children form unhealthy attachments in childhood, they are at greater risk of developing psychological and behavioral problems later in life. Luckily, there are several tools you can use to build a healthy relationship with your foster child.

When you first start getting to know your foster child, you may notice certain behavioral or relationship patterns. Look for signs of healthy or unhealthy attachment so you can give your child the care he or she needs. There are three types of attachment:

- Secure Attachment – this is the ideal attachment between a parent and child. Securely attached children feel confident to explore the world, knowing that they can always return to their parent for safety, comfort, and advice.
- Ambivalent Attachment – children desperately want an emotional connection with their parent, but act out or resist forming a bond when the opportunity arises. Children with ambivalent attachments will avoid strangers or relationships with peers, as well.
- Avoidant Attachment – children are disinterested in their parents and seek comfort from strangers or friends. Children with avoidant attachments do not form emotional bonds with their parents and instead resort to learning about the world in unsafe ways.

Children with ambivalent attachments have difficulty trusting anyone. Show your child that you are trustworthy and reliable by being consistent, emotionally available, and non-judgmental.

Children with avoidant attachments have been taught that parental figures are not a good source of comfort or guidance. Help your child re-learn what a good parent does by setting boundaries, actively listening to your child, and encouraging your child's healthy interests and good behavior.

Now that you understand your child's current level of attachment, you can start building a healthier attachment with your child using these key strategies.

### Body Language

Children are incredibly perceptive. So, body language and non-verbal cues are crucial to building a healthy, trusting relationship. Make eye contact with your child and face them whenever you are communicating to show them that you are focused on their needs. Smile when you talk with your child to express warmth and openness.

From an early age, children associate physical touch with emotional comfort. Children who form ambivalent or avoidant attachments with their caregivers are often deprived of physical affection. Teach your child that you are a source of comfort and safety by giving your child hugs, patting your child on the back, or holding your child's hand when he or she is sad, scared, or seeking attention.

### Verbal Communication

Many foster children have been conditioned to feel like they are just one of many children in need of a home and a family. To start unraveling that feeling of insignificance, make yourself available to your child. Be responsive when he or she approaches you and never ignore your child.

Practice **active listening** with your child to get at the heart of what your child needs. Be patient with your child. Try to say things in a new way if your child seems to be having trouble understanding or following directions.

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## Activities

Often times when children have formed insecure attachments with past caregivers, it is because they have felt neglected. Engage in play activities with your child that allow him or her to take the lead. Follow along as your child creates an imaginary scenario, plays with figures or dolls, or draws. Choose activities that give your child the chance to tell a story. Then listen carefully and encourage your child to continue expressing him- or herself.

Foster children are at greater risk for developing unhealthy attachments throughout childhood. But that doesn't mean that all hope is lost. On the contrary – you can help your child learn what healthy relationships look like and how to communicate in times of distress.

Get to know your child and his or her needs. Then prove to your child that you are there for them, no matter what. Soon, you'll be able to nurture a healthy, secure attachment with your child and be the safe haven they've always needed.

Rai C. <https://www.scripted.com>

Iowa relies on dedicated and passionate Resource Families (foster and adoptive families) to meet the unique needs of children in foster care and their families. To better support you in that important role, DHS is combining the current work of the Recruitment & Retention of Resource Families Contract (i.e. Iowa KidsNet) and Training & Support of Foster Parents (i.e. IFAPA) into one service. This new service delivery model is called **Recruitment, Retention, Training and Support (RRTS)**. RRTS begins July 1, 2017.

After July 1, foster and adoptive families will continue to receive training and support as you do today. DHS has awarded RRTS to Four Oaks and Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI) and is in the process of finalizing contracts for this service. LSI will serve about the Western third of the state and Four Oaks will serve the remainder of the state.

Four Oaks and LSI know you have many questions. We will be working closely together to communicate the specific RRTS enhancements and answer your questions. When more details become available, we will communicate to you what we know, so please watch your email for future updates. In the meantime, we thank you for the great work you do every day caring for Iowa's children and their families!

**WORTH SIX HOURS FOSTER PARENT CREDIT**

**EQUIP...LAUNCH...SUCCESS!**

**PREPARING YOUR TEEN FOR A SECURE JOURNEY TO ADULTHOOD**

**SATURDAY - APRIL 22**

**FREE EVENT FOR YOUTH (AGE 14+) AND FOSTER PARENTS TO ATTEND TOGETHER**

**BETTENDORF**

**SCOTT COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE - STUDENT LIFE CENTER - 500 BELMONT ROAD**

**EVENT IS 9AM TO 4:30PM >>>> REGISTRATION 8:30AM TO 9AM**

**FREE BREAKFAST & LUNCH - GIVEAWAYS FOR TEENS & PARENTS**

**MORNING SESSION**

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING – IT IS HERE AND THRIVING IN IOWA!**

This training is geared to both youth and foster parents/caregivers, and will consist of a candid discussion on how Human Trafficking operatives work, impact on victims, and how people serving youth can identify and respond. Iowa examples and stories will be shared to clarify situations. This presentation also contains statistics of trafficking trends, and video testimonials of actual victims of Human Trafficking. National statistics show that 68% of youth coming out of "the life" experienced the child welfare system at some point in their lives so we need to protect the youth with foster, adopt or accept guardianship of. **Trainer: Ruth Buckels, LMSW**

**WORTH SIX HOURS FOSTER PARENT CREDIT**

**AFTERNOON SESSION**

**PLANNING FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO PERMANENCY**

Planning for the future can be overwhelming for all youth but for those exiting the foster care system it can be even more challenging but is also very necessary. Centering the transition plan around the youth who is transitioning is one of the most important ways to help pave the way to a successful adult life. The workshop will provide information and resources about the transition process from foster care to adulthood in Iowa and how foster parents can participate effectively. Information for both teens and adults regarding community resources will be available.

**Trainer: Terri Bailey**

**REGISTER ONLINE AT IFAPA.ORG OR CALL IFAPA @ 800.277.8145. PLEASE BE SURE TO RSVP FOR YOUR TEEN TOO.**

