



What you never had.....

Many people have gone through the process of buying a car. Some look forward to it, some would rather get a root canal. Sometimes the car is brand new, and for others, it is gently used. Much depends on what you have in the budget, but the bottom line is you want to get the most for your money. Yet, even with a budget, there are things you feel “you just can’t do without.” That is based on your past experience and what you may have heard or read. When I bought my first car, it had power brakes, windows that rolled up by hand, and 4-60 air conditioning (for those that don’t remember, that is when you rolled down all four windows and went 60 miles an hour). With my second car, I wanted air conditioning-and I got it. I did not care if I had power windows or not-it wasn’t important because I had the air conditioning. But the package deal with the car included power windows. After that, I couldn’t do without them, not just for convenience, but also for not having to crank the window while I was driving, which was a distraction. Decades later, heated seats are on my list. Those last couple sentences probably make a lot of sense to most people, but you may wonder why the story.

The truth is we often do not appreciate what we have until we know it exists or have experienced it. This is true of your training experience. When you first wanted to be a resource parent, you had to attend class. For some, it was in person, for others, due to Covid, it was via ZOOM. Being in class gave you the opportunity to hear from people who maybe did not move in your regular circle of socialization-different jobs, different locations, different life styles, different races, or different generations. When people presented their ideas, you may or may not have agreed with them, but it made you think. While ZOOM gave part of that experience, it does not come close to in-person contact, where you can read a person’s expression or see their total body language, all of which lends a great deal to the context in which they were speaking. It’s the stuff that makes you either want to hug them in agreement, or shake your head for having another opinion. Either way, you make a connection.

Making connections is what in-person meetings, such as the covered dish trainings, is all about. Much like buying a car, how you choose to get training is based on what you have experienced. I will never understand someone who buys a car over the internet-site unseen and never driven. I know when I go and try and explore, I have a much richer experience, and a better knowledge base for making the choices I will live with for years. I also get to know the staff that will help me with any problems I may encounter in the future. Simply said, please try to attend more in-person meetings and see what exactly you are missing.

Upcoming Events

Flag Day
June 14, 2023

Father’s Day
June 18, 2023

Resource Parent
Appreciation Day
June 19, 2023

Juneteenth
June 19, 2023

SWAN Conference
Conference
June 21-23, 2023

Independence Day
July 4, 2023
Office Closed

Conference call
July 13, 2023
Details on Page 2

Parent’s Day
July 23, 2023

Self-Care Summer
Support Group
Dates and Times on
Page 2

TRAINING INFORMATION

WFS Foster and Adoption Training

WFS in Wilkinsburg

Contact Whitney Kelly to register at
412-342-2339 or
whitney.kelly@wfsa.org

July 10, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Orientation

Who Are the Children?

July 12, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Who Are the Parents?

Child Development

July 17, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Grief and Loss

Stabilizing Their World

July 19, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Abuse and Neglect

Attachment

July 24, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Parenting

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting

July 26, 2023 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Mental Health

Resources

See Page 12 for information on CPR/First Aid training on line. It must be renewed every two years.

Training

Recertification Training Hours:

PA DHS regulations require 6 hours of annual training.

Wesley Family Services' Recommendation:

Primary caregiver 20 hours Secondary caregiver 20 hours. Four of these hours need to include in person training.

Please note: If you are newly certified, you need to begin earning training hours immediately. The hours earned for certification do not count toward your first recertification.

Resource Parent Association Conference Call



Our next conference call is scheduled for **July 13, 2023 at 6:00 PM.**

Resource parents can join the call by dialing **857-232-0155** and entering the conference code **269736** when prompted. We hope more resource families will join in!

Our agenda will include:

- ✧ Resource Parent Appreciation Day Recap
- ✧ Summer resources
- ✧ Your cares and concerns

Please remember to use your mute button until you are ready to talk if you have kids or critters running around while you are on the call.

Selfcare Summer

Resource Parent Support Group

This support group is a chance to trouble-shoot parenting issues, learn ways to cope with chaos, learn to teach kids selfcare, get support from those who have been there/done that, and earn one hour of training. The next meetings are:

- June 6: 11:00AM to 12:30PM
- June 27: 6:00PM to 7:30PM
- July 11: 11:00AM to 12:30PM
- July 25: 6:00PM to 7:30PM
- August 8: 11:00AM to 12:30PM
- August 22: 6:00PM to 7:30PM

Email emma.eberle@wfsa.org or rebekah.daniels@wfsa.org to RSVP and get the ZOOM link.



Covered Dish Training

There is no Covered Dish Training scheduled for June or July. Instead, we will be happy to see you all at the Resource Parent Appreciation Day at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium on June 19, 2023!



Resource Parent Association Updates



The Wesley Family Services' Resource Parent Association met for a conference call on May 9, 2023. There were five resource parents and five staff in attendance.

Annette started the meeting with her updates and extending a thanks to all the resource parents for all that they do to provide good homes for our children. She let the resource parents know how the auditors were impressed with what the resource parents do to stabilize the children placed in their home. § She also explained what staffing means to the program and how it impacts the rates. The good news is that no staff has resigned, and we have new hires. N'Phenitie Walker, who prefers to be called Keilani, will be a case aide three days a week. Christelle Diffenbaugh was an intern who came back as a coordinator. We are adding Savanna Smith who is both an intern and coordinator. Sarah Davis is coming over from in-home to help out. We have been supplementing with interns for support. Jason and Tara graduated and went back to their counties. We still have Rebekah and Emma. They provide support in the home and facilitate training. They will be continuing the foster parent support sessions, making a couple changes. § Recruitment is an on-going goal, and we will be doing some at the zoo. We need to keep spreading the word and can never do enough. § Staff are doing a Scavenger Hunt. There are three teams. They did videos and some activities. They went into restaurants, hung flyers, and hosted events. All teams have sponsored a community event. § At the zoo we will be not only have a table but will also have coverage for social media. A media group will be at the zoo to do some videos with the resource parents for social media. § Annette shared survey results. This was the best response ever. We will also use some of their statements for recruiting. Annette asked the group for interview questions. Courtney offered-Why do you foster? What is your happiest memory? Has anything surprised you or has anything been unexpected?

Spring Trainings were discussed. The PA Resource Parent Association conference that was scheduled for May 20, 2023 was canceled due to lack of registrations. The covered dish training that was to be facilitated by Kristina Terrell was also canceled due to lack of registrations. Discussion focused on what we can do to encourage trainings. In person versus virtual-what can we do? Romaine and Patrick had discussed this and suggested maybe not scheduling every other month, maybe do them three times a year, building it up and having giveaways. Another suggestion was to give more notice. Annette shared that surveys indicated resource parents thought there were too many emails, and important things were getting lost. They also said there were too many choices, and they were getting emails from other agencies. A suggestion was made to do two calendars-one as Wesley trainings and other as Wesley affiliated events. We also found some of information in the newsletter is incorrect concerning other agency trainings, and we will follow up with the person who organizes it. An interactive calendar on the website is also a goal, color coordinating the different trainings, but this is not available yet. Kristina suggested that information get filtered through the coordinators. She also suggested maybe meeting at a Starbucks, or somewhere different, and make it more social. Annette has asked Kristina to put information together for resource parents to talk about their rights if they are granted educational or medical rights. Kristina added that she will also talk about being a part of the conversation before those rights are granted so the information a resource parent knows can be included in the decision. She will schedule one on one information sessions with anyone who is interested. There has been a mandate for trauma informed training. Reasonable and Prudent Parenting has to be renewed each year and that is done at recertification. The state wants one hour of trauma informed care training per year. We do provide different options. We will offer trauma informed care twice a year. Robin will monitor the training list and will let resource parents know if they still need it. If they do not have it, they will get the one hour of training at their recertification.

Resource Parent Appreciation Day was reviewed. It will occur on June 19, 2023, a Monday and also Juneteenth. Resource parents will receive some training credit of attending. *(continued page 4)*





Additional training is provided through the Training Co-op which is composed of fourteen local adoption agencies. You are welcome to register for any of these classes. When you have completed the class, please submit proof of attendance so that we can credit the training to your annual training requirement.

June	Title	Location	Time	RSVP
06/03/23	Trauma Informed Care \$25.00 Fee	Auberle ZOOM Training	9:00AM-3:00PM	FPDocuments@aublerle.org
06/13/23	Street Drugs	Pressley Ridge ZOOM Training	6:00PM-7:30PM	ldamico@pressleyridge.org
06/14/23	CSEC	Auberle - Teams	6:00PM-8:00PM	FPDocuments@aublerle.org
06/22/23	Keeping Our Kids from the Blues	Wesley Family Services	6:00PM-8:00PM	shana.orlic@wfspa.org

At the time this newsletter was composed, Co-Op training notices only extended through June. As trainings for July become available, resource parents will be notified.

Resource Parent Association Update *(continued from page 3)*

The need to RSVP on time was emphasized. The KEEP program for hair and skin care will be present at the zoo to provide information on their program. Annette is also looking for private individuals to also contribute. Courtney suggested the Alpha Iota Alpha Sorority to be there, and Annette agreed to contact them.

The Popcorn Fundraiser made a little over \$800. We talked about the cost of the Resource Parent Appreciation Day. While the tickets are free, we pay for the tent and food, which is sizeable, thus the need to increase participation in fund raising.

Summer schedules were discussed. Resource parents were encouraged to start looking at camps. Some referrals have been made to the county already. If you have a child that needs to go to camp, plan early, because there is still some funding, but it is limited. Additionally, let the coordinator know your vacation plans so visits can be rescheduled. Kristina talked about the Summer Boost Programs. Kristina let the resource parents on the call know it was still available for a week. She explained the program. It provides educational and other activities for children in the Pittsburgh Public School District.

Courtney talked about Alpha Iota Alpha Christian Sorority Group, community project that raises funds to aid youth, foster care youth, teen mothers, families of children who are incarcerated, and the homeless. One project, Hair Blitz, will provide school supplies, back packs, etc-it will be scheduled close to before school starting.

Resource parents were asked about their cares and concerns. The only comment was to ask if Wesley wear would be available. Annette is working on it.

AFFIRM Training

AFFIRM training is a requirement for all resource parents who are open to taking children of any age from Allegheny County, as children recognize their sexual or gender identity at different ages. *All classes are via ZOOM.*

To Register: Go to www.tinyurl.com/AFFIRMCaregiver

Session Dates	Time
June 7, 14, 21	6:00PM to 8:00PM
June 6, 13, 20	8:00AM to 10:00AM
July 11, 18, 25	6:00PM to 8:00PM
July 17, 24, 31	Noon to 2:00PM
August 16, 23, 30	6:00PM to 8:00PM
August 8, 15, 22	8:00AM to 10:00AM



AFFIRM classes are required by Allegheny County. Be aware that if you do not have the AFFIRM training, you may not be able to take an Allegheny County placement. You will continue to be eligible for placements from other counties.

AFFIRM classes have limited enrollment, and, as all of the agencies who contract with Allegheny County are requiring their resource parents to take these classes, the classes fill up quickly. *Please register early.*



Resource Parent Appreciation Day!

Our Resource Parent Appreciation Day is scheduled for **Monday, June 19, 2023** at The Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium. Please note that this is a change from our normal Friday date, but this is what the zoo had available. We hope you can come and enjoy time together and see the animals. We will be celebrating our Resource Family of the Year, Resource Advocate of the Year, Teen Parent of the Year, and, of course, the children. There may be a surprise animal visit at the tent prior to the award ceremony. The KEEP Program will have information available for hair and skin care. The Alpha Iota Alpha Sorority will also be there to present information on their program. Plan to bring your family and have a great day! Reservations must be made by June 4, 2023.



Training Hours Matter

Give yourself a quick quiz:



How many of hours of training are needed annually for you to be recertified? **20**

How many hours need to be face to face (ZOOM and phone conferences included)? **6**

When do you need to start earning hours? **As soon as you are certified, and every year thereafter by your anniversary date.**

How many hours of training do you have????

Please **do not wait until the last minute** to accrue training hours. There are so many opportunities- do not wait until there is too little time.

Recruiting

PLEASE send us any upcoming activities in your neighborhood. Romaine Rinier can get in touch, and we may be able to set up a table to recruit families just like you! If the event occurs, you will receive a \$50 bonus! Remember, referring a person who becomes a resource parent will earn you \$100! You can also earn \$50 if you attend an event as a WFS representative for every four hours you man a table. If anyone you speak to becomes a resource parent, you also get the \$100 bonus!

Staff News



Christelle Deffenbaugh

This is a person who should be familiar to you. Christelle started as an intern the past summer, and just interning alone made her realize this was what she wanted to with life. Wesley Family Services felt like a home environment for her and she loves being back!

Meet our new case aide, N'Phenitie Walker. She prefers to be called Keilani since it is much easier to pronounce and spell. She is a mom of a two-year old baby girl, a military spouse, Penn State student, and photographer. She and her family moved from the Delaware County area; but she and her husband are originally from Philadelphia. She said she lives off of art, music, coffee, photography, smiles and all things positive. She loves working with children and is ecstatic about joining the staff at Wesley Family Services and just really making a difference in so many lives. Her goal is to strive to make an impact on those who need it the most.



Keilani Walker

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Savanna Smith

Savanna is a counseling intern from Carlow University. She has a passion for helping others, especially children.



After completing a year's internship with Wesley Family Services, Sidney graduated from University of Louisville with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. Way to go Sidney! Congratulations!



Sidney Webber

WE ARE FAMILY!



Congratulations to James and Nora Shaner on the adoption of their son. Finn was adopted on Wednesday, April 5, 2023 and is now known as Finnegan James Shaner.



Congratulations to Dennis and Jennifer Baker on the adoption of their daughter, Soraya Hope, on May 19, 2023! Soraya joins her big sister Abby to make one happy family!



Thank You!

May is National Foster Care Month. Thank you to all of the resource parents who have created or helped preserve families for our children. The work that you do brings you joy, frustration, satisfaction, surprises, excitement, and pride-among a few other emotions! But in that myriad of feelings, you bring stability and safety to a child's world. Not everyone is cut out for this calling, some are not willing to endure the uncertainty or potential hardships. So while you do this willingly and with a calmness of heart, never let anyone tell you that you are not very, very special. Thank you for all that you do!

It's About The Kids!



Jayceon received \$100 for his perfect report card. Steve Davis of Davis Associates challenged him to be excellent. Jayceon accepted the challenge, and this report card he has straight A's.



Let's hear it for the Monstars! Not only do they play great baseball, but they are some of the cutest recruiters the Wesley Family Services' foster care program has!



Konner H. went fishing with Jon Simmons at Keystone. What a catch!!!!!!

Michael Brown looks absolutely dashing in this prom picture!



Birthdays!

June

Eric S. 6/3

Matt PR 6/3

Kyere T. 6/5

Kartier M. 6/5

Jim S. 6/6

Jayden A. 6/7

Chloe H. 6/10

Ben G. 6/10

Glenn K. 6/11

James N. 6/12

Troy A. 6/13

Kim M. 6/16

Harmonie W. 6/17

Shaian G. 6/17

Ashley K. 6/18

Dakota S. 6/20

Elliott A. 6/21

Erica S. 6/21

June

Riley G. 6/28

Shirley P. 6/30

Avya K. 6/30

July

Michael M. 7/5

Emalee T. 7/5

Dia L. 7/5

Emily U. 7/5

Jessenia M. 7/6

Courtney H. 7/8

Gunner G. 7/13

Vanessa C. 7/18

Charlize S 7/20

Jeff R. 7/22

Megan R. 7/27

Dominck R. 7/27

Hannah A. 7/28

Aerianna P. 7/29

New Resource Families!



Zachery and Amanda Nabors

WANTED

We are constantly looking for more families just like you! You do an awesome job, and it shows in the children and youth that are in your care. Please take every opportunity to spread the word that resource families are needed—our kids are counting on you!

FUN PAGE



Fireworks!

1. Fill a mason jar 3/4 of the way full with warm water.
2. In a separate bowl, mix 3 to 4 tablespoons of oil and 4 drops each of 4 different colors of food coloring.
3. Use a fork to gently mix the oil and food coloring together. No need to blend it, just stir them up.
4. Gently pour the mixture into the jar.
5. Watch what happens. The food coloring will slowly sink out of the oil and into the water. When this happens, it will expand and begin to mix with the other colors.

Just in case you want to explain the science behind it: Food coloring dissolves in water but not in oil. Because the oil is less dense than the water, it will float to the top. The colored droplets will begin dissolving into the water (which looks like an explosion).

Taken from <https://www.icanteachmychild.com/fireworks-in-a-jar/>

4th of July Twig Ornaments

You will need:

Twigs-5 per star=15 twigs

Red, white, and blue acrylic paint

White glue and glitter

Glue gun

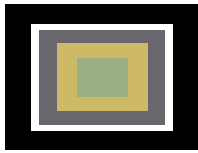
Snippers

Fishing line

Cut the twigs with the snippers so they are roughly all the same length. The length determines the size of the stars. Remove any loose bits of bark. Paint each twig (5 red, 5 white, 5 blue). Let them dry and then lay them out to form your stars. Make sure all intersecting points are touching. Use the glue gun to make the connecting points adhere to each other. When the glue is cool, you can add glitter with the white glue to make your stars sparkle. Let them dry thoroughly-the white of the glue will disappear. Use the fishing line to hang them wherever you want a touch of patriotism!



Taken from <https://happyhooligans.ca/4th-july-twig-ornaments/>



Resources

- ♥ Financial Empowerment for Youth Who Have Aged Out of Foster Care - <https://www.moneygeek.com/financial-planning/resources-for-foster-youth-aging-out/>
- ♥ Families Like Ours is a Facebook group for LGBTQ parents. The group does camping, pot lucks, and gatherings. The children in the family can readily identify with families just like theirs. The woman who runs the group was involved in working with the ACLU to legalize same sex marriage in Pennsylvania.
- ♥ Caring Connections for YOUth is a website provides access to supports and services for any youth, up to age eighteen, living in Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as a diversion to the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems. Check out this resource at <https://cc4youth.org/>
- ♥ Alpha Iota Alpha Christian Sorority, Inc. is a non-denominational, non-collegiate sorority that has a vision to influence, empower, and support youth in education and spiritual development. If this fits into your beliefs, check them out at <https://alphaiotaalpha.org/>
- ♥ Need a Phone List form for the refrigerator? Go to http://www.familyshoppingbag.com/img/view-print.php?img=Emergency_Chart_984035.png
- ♥ The 412 Youth Zone is operating virtually. Youth Zone staff continue to provide services to members throughout the community, and by phone, text, and social media. The clinic is currently open by appointment Tuesdays and Thursdays each week, and members can schedule appointments by calling 412-615-4038. Check out their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/412YouthZone/> for updates to programming and important resources.
- ♥ AFN Foster Parent of Teens Support Group: This support group is held every other month from 6pm to 8pm. It is located at the Allegheny Family Network office on 425 North Craig Street in Pittsburgh. This is an open group who welcomes all foster and adoptive parent of teens. Dinner is provided. Please register by calling Linda Mitchell at 412-290-9190.
- ♥ The Allegheny Self Care Initiative offers free hair care, hair products, and training in hair care for children, youth, and resource families involved in the foster care system. The My Best Self program also offer activities to increase self-esteem and self-awareness. For more information, contact your coordinator for a referral.
- ♥ Don't forget that CPR/First Aid must be updated every two years. If you have been certified by an instructor, you are permitted to renew on line (as long as we have a copy of your initial cards in your file). One great resource is <https://www.nationalcprfoundation.com> . The normal price is \$20.95. There are several options for training, so be sure to choose the one that includes both CPR and First Aid.
- ♥ Free diapers and pull-ups are available through Life Works of Western Pennsylvania, 1323 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:00am until 2:00pm. Contact Sheilah (412-606-1392); Florence (412-606-1652); or Deborah (412-609-3456).
- ♥ If you have any students who need credit recovery, please reach out to Erin Frawley erin.frawley@alleghenycounty.us so she can reach out to caseworker and KIDSVOICE
- ♥ Free COVID testing is available. At-Home Covid Tests are available at <https://www.covidtests.gov/>. Simply open the link and follow simple instructions.

Preserving Relationships

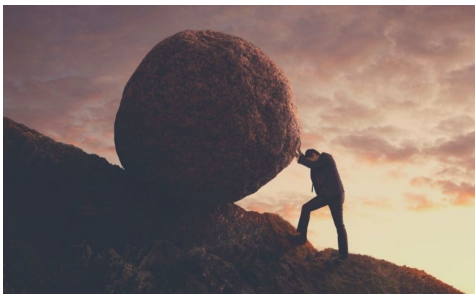
When a child is placed in a home, the primary focus is always, and should be, on the child and their adjustment to the home. Care is given to assure they develop relationships with the resource parent and the other children in the home. Communication with the school is important to make sure they are adjusting well to school and their peers. Resource parents are encouraged to enroll the child in activities to promote socialization.

All of this is important, and it all works, right? Well, not always. Raising children is difficult when you have biological children, but studies have found that resource parents scores were consistently higher on parental stress tests than biological parents. While that may not surprise you, it is interesting to know those scores for resource parents tended to be much higher, often above the 85th percentile.

Sometimes the challenges our children have faced have impacted their ability to trust anyone enough to build a relationship, and therefore, there are many “bumps” along the way. Those “bumps” can revibrate through the entire household.



When resource parents attend pre-service training, they are encouraged to nurture their own relationships with their support people. Couples often do not pay much attention to this advice, feeling their relationship is strong and they are committed to helping a child in need. Single parents do not often think this applies to them, simply because they are single. However, everyone has someone they depend on for support, and it cannot be assumed that the support is unconditional. You may be reading this now and thinking, “Not me, I have unconditional support.” Hopefully that is true, and it is something that may get tested as your child adjusts to your home, family, and community-and the success will be based on the degree of resilience in that relationship.



Masten once defined resilience as “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development.” When you look at resilience, risk/vulnerability factors (likelihood of harmful or negative events occurring in a set time period/the factors that increase that risk) and protective factors (conditions or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events) play key roles. These factors interact to produce adaptive outcomes.

Simply said, if you and your family were trees during a hurricane, how well would you all be able to bend with the wind? More importantly, what do you have going for you that allows you to bend?

There are many stressors to consider when a child is placed in a new home. Is what you were told about the child correct and full disclosure? What do they like to eat? What are their sleeping patterns and how long will it be before you know how soundly they sleep? What are their manners? What is their wardrobe like and what needs to be done about it? What is their physical health-do they have any medical issues that need follow up? Do they have lice? How do they handle stress? What is their overall mental health? How will meetings with the birth parents go? Those questions and others go through your mind as the child also has thoughts. When will I go home? Will I see my friends soon? What will *they* do to me? What if I mess up? These are some of many things that may be going on in a child’s mind, which may affect how they react to any given situation in your home or community. This in turn can precipitate behaviors that can test the patience of a saint.



While you are thinking about all of your questions, your spouse or support person may be thinking about their own set of questions. Do you share the same priorities for what is important, or how

to handle any given situation? This is the basis of building in the protective factors that determine how well you “can bend in the wind.” Having discussions about what is important will help you to have a similar vision of what is going on. If one person is intent on pursuing manners, but the other is more concerned with hygiene, you can become not only frustrated with the child, but also with each other. However, if you are both focused on the same thing(s), you can plan together how to handle different situations, and you feel more like a team. What if the considerations are at a higher level, such as trying to determine when a placement is working or not working? There are resource parents who feel they will work through a situation as long as A, B, and C happen (or do not happen), while the other parent or support person may say B and C are optional. It does not matter what A, B, and C are—they are different for everyone; everyone has a non-negotiable list. They can include property damage, self-harm, hurting another child in the home (either physically or psychologically), or physical aggression toward a resource parent. Not all risk factors come from the child. There are studies that suggest there are more stressors that come from working with the system, rather than the child. A big stressor is when a child leaves the home, whether it is your choice or the court’s choice. Another stressor is a change in caseworkers or coordinators, particularly if this was someone you came to trust or rely on. What if you feel your child needs services (which would support the child and you), by they are assessed as not needing them? What if you get notice that you have been reported to abuse children and will be investigated? These are all risk factors, and many times, multiple risk factors are in place at one time. Sometimes the stress comes for just doing your best, but recognizing you are only human. Fostering children takes a tremendous amount of time (court, conferences, visits, therapy, ...), it tends to steal all of your emotion fostering will pull at your heart until there is little left for anyone else), it piles on the stress, it can pit you against each other, and it drains all of your energy. Once again, the important question is what do you need to do to get on common ground? Unfortunately, marriages, relationships, and friendships have ended based on disagreeing on how to work with a child who is trying to manage their own world. Dr. Gatchel, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School concurs, saying relationship stress is often particularly challenging for people who are in a role as caretaker for a child, ailing adult relative, or partner. The stress that comes with these challenges can adversely affect your health. It becomes a downward spiral if you do not become proactive.



Protective factors are what help to balance the risk factors, which fosters ongoing adaptations. According to a study conducted by Elizabeth Sharda, resource parents who reported higher levels of social support reported being less negatively affected by parenting stress. It was a small study, but some may say that the results are just common sense. If you are connected to your agency and feel able to rely on them, connected to a support group, or connected to a

church family who supports your placements, you can feel some of the weight lifted from your shoulders. You do not have to be your only source for possible solutions to what is going on in your home. If the pandemic made one thing clear, it was that we need human contact and the reaction of others. Dr. Jennifer Gatchel stated that nurturing relationships contribute to healthy brain functioning. Make your self-care a priority. You need to have the ability to take care of yourself in order to take care of someone else. As a couple, you need to nurture that relationship with time to yourselves. Practice self-awareness. Take time to be clear on your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Discuss your thoughts with your partner or support person to make sure you are “on the same page.” Practice empathy. It is a true skill to be able to put yourself in the place of your partner, your support person, and your child. Understanding does not give permission for whatever is going

on, but it does help you see things a little more objectively, which may help you handle the situation better. Explore how flexible you can be. Everyone has the ability to give a little-can you challenge yourself to give just a little bit more? Continue to prepare yourself for when the child leaves. Sabrina Romanoff, PSYD, suggests truly exploring your intentions, expectations, and goals as a resource parent. She states that “fostering” is not permanent, and the goal is to provide a safe, stable, nurturing, and caring temporary environment. Being honest with yourself will help you be more aligned with the role without trying to force something that was not the original intent. While there is always grief and loss when a child leaves, understanding your role can soften the blow.

Try to figure out how to rebalance responsibilities. Make a list of who does what to see if the responsibilities are truly one sided. It is easy when you are overwhelmed to assume the other person is not doing enough. Once you have your list, decide which responsibilities take more time or are more difficult and code them red. Next look at the ones that are easy and code them green. The number of responsibilities is not so much the problem, as the balance of difficulty. Decide if any can be eliminated or delegated to other support sources.

Having difficulty in a relationship is not unusual, and generally it can be worked through. Dr. Gatchel points out that there are generally warning signs. These include:

- ◇ Feeling burned out or depleted after interactions
- ◇ Having negative thoughts about the relationship
- ◇ Feeling like the relationship is imbalance-that one person gives or takes more than the other
- ◇ Feeling that you are not valued or respected by the other person.

One of the challenges for resource parents who raise challenging children is that they focus so much on the child that they tend to ignore what is happening in the relationship, generally feeling they can take care of it later. Later is likely not a good time frame. If you recognize any of the above signs, it means you need to take time to take a closer look at what is happening. Look at the patterns of the relationship over time. The bottom line is that the goal in your home is to raise children who will leave you with an empty nest. At that time, you need to have a relationship with either your partner or support persons that will sustain you for the rest of your life.



Here are some tips for healthier relationships:

- ♥ Be an empathic listener. Pay attention when someone is speaking and try to understand where they are coming from. Reflect their words back to make sure what you thought you heard is what they really meant.
 - ♥ Let the person who is talking be the center of attention. Keep the attention on them and their needs, rather than countering with an issue you may be facing.
 - ♥ Stay calm. This keeps the conversation constructive. If calm is not possible in the moment, take a step back and take some time out. It's better to deal with an issue when calm prevails.
 - ♥ Remember HALT. If you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, address those issues before pursuing a problem.
 - ♥ Interact in person. Do not communicate about tense situations by text or email, where you do not have the benefit of their tone of voice or facial expressions. These often alter the context of what you read.
 - ♥ Emphasize the positive. In almost anything that happens, there is something positive. Find and recognize it, even if it is just to express appreciation to the person for sharing their feelings.
- Set boundaries. For example, if you are going through a period with a friend or partner where

they seem to be continually needing more than you have to give, set a time limit for interaction so that you do not get totally drained.

- ♥ PLAN. That's not an acronym, it just needs to be emphasized. You generally cannot do things at the drop of a hat, but time for yourself can occur if you plan ahead. Plus it gives you something to look forward to.
- ♥ Once you have a plan, make sure you follow through with it. Ask for help, it is out there.
- ♥ Use the resources that are available to you. This may be friends that are willing to help or leaning into your agency. If you are acquainted with other resource parents that you have met at events, foster that relationship and taking turns watching each other's children to get a rest.
- ♥ Therapy is good for the kids, but it is also good for you if you find that there is too much stress in your relationships.

The greater number of protective factors you have in your toolbox, the greater the chance of meeting challenges together. While it is impossible to expect to agree on everything, if you have good communication and a commitment to try to work together, many challenges can be successfully met. Working on and meeting these challenges will actually strengthen your relationships.

Make
the odds be
in your favor.

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Training: Preserving Relationships

Complete and return this form to Whitney Kelly for 2 hours of training credit

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Name your three strongest support people:

2. _____ is the capacity of a dynamic system to adopt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development.

3. _____ are the elements that increase the likelihood of harmful or negative events occurring in a set time period.

4. _____ are the conditions or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events.

5. Name three potential stressors (the ones that concern you most) for when a foster child is placed in the home:

6. ____T ____F While you may be dealing with potential stressors, so is the foster child entering your home, as well as your partner or support person.

7. The basis of building _____ is to discuss your priorities to see if they are similar and to plan together how to handle any given situation.

8. Make two lists below to include *your* three non-negotiable behaviors or situations and *your partner or support person's* top three non-negotiable items:

1 _____ 1 _____

2 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 3 _____

9. ____T ____F All stressors originate from the foster child's behaviors.

10. ____T ____F Studies show that if you are connected to your agency, a support group, or a church family, you can feel less stressed in difficult situations.

11. Nurturing relationships leads to healthy _____ functioning.

12. Name three warning signs that your relationship may be stressed:

13. Name three things you can practice to nurture your relationships.

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