Foster care is intended to provide temporary, safe living arrangements for children who cannot remain safely at home. When removal occurs, the child is placed into a foster home. Although the goal of foster care is permanency, either through reunification with family or adoption, many children spend years in foster homes. These children are at increased risk for a variety of emotional, physical, behavioral, and academic problems. Additionally, foster parents have reported many unmet needs such as a lack of support, inadequate access to resources, and feeling unprepared for their role as foster parents. In response, much work is under way to help ensure these vulnerable families have the support, resources, and skills they need.

How You Can Support Foster Families
Working with foster parents can be immensely rewarding. They are often highly motivated and in need of support. Providing parenting education to foster parents can be a catalyst for change in the lives of foster children. It can also strengthen community, providing a place where non-foster parents and foster parents alike can learn from and encourage one another. As a parenting educator, you can support and provide resources to an often-overlooked group of parents, and ultimately help guide foster families toward a path of healing.
Did you know?

A total of 11,445 children were served in Oregon’s foster care system in 2018.

Children in foster care range in age from birth to 21 years old.

The #1 reason children enter foster care is due to abuse and neglect.

Source: Oregon.gov 2018 Child Welfare Data Book

Foster Parent Resource List

Given the large number of children in foster care, their diverse demographics, and often traumatic histories, it is important that foster parents have access to resources to best support their foster children.

Below is a list of state and national resources that can be shared with foster parents.

State Resources

**Oregon Foster Parent Association**

OFPA’s mission is to improve the quality of the foster care system in Oregon. Here, foster parents can find Oregon’s latest child welfare news, including information on the state’s annual foster parenting conference (Shoulder to Shoulder), and resources regarding advocacy, family fun, preserving sibling relationships, peer mentoring, and more. www.ofpa.com

**Every Child Oregon**

Every Child partners with Oregon’s Department of Human Services to support foster families. Through Every Child, foster parents can receive support in the following areas: tangible needs, Foster Parent Night Out, and transportation to and from services and visits. www.everychildoregon.org

**Oregon State Parks**

Oregon State Parks offers a special access pass for foster, guardian, and adoptive parents of Oregon foster children. This pass includes free camping and day-use parking. Families may camp overnight for free in a tent, RV or standard horse camp site for up to 14 nights in a calendar month. www.oregonstateparks.org
Foster Parent Resource List (Continued)

Camp to Belong

Camp to Belong is a one-week residential summer camp that provides separated foster siblings a chance to reconnect and make childhood memories together. Camp To Belong has proven to be a powerful intervention for separated siblings in foster care. www.kindredmatters.org

Oregon CASA Network

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are trained volunteers who advocate for children in court. They examine the case, talk to the child and the adults involved, and make recommendations to the Judge. CASAs can be a good ally for foster parents in advocating for the children in their care. You can also check your local CASA office for a foster child clothing closet. www.oregoncasanetwork.org

Oregon Zoo

The Oregon Zoo offers discounted admission for Oregon’s certified foster homes. All who present an Oregon photo ID and a foster home certificate are eligible to buy up to 4 tickets for $5 each. www.oregonzoo.org/zoo-all

Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center Lending Library

The OPRARC Lending Library includes books, CDs, DVDs, and more available in a variety of languages and communication formats. Items from this library are mailed for free to Oregon foster parents, with return postage paid. Foster parents can check out up to five library items at a time. This library is a special collection for parents of foster children; topics include Attachment & Bonding, Respite Care, Race & Culture, and many more. For more information, see: www.orparc.org/library-request-materials.php?tn=4

Thinking Local to Save Money

Many foster parents end up using their own money to provide for foster children, so it is nice to spread the word on local opportunities to save! See below for a list of businesses known to offer discounts to foster parents. Check with your local providers for more information.

- YMCA
- Museums (see Regional Arts & Culture Council)
- Bowling (see Kids Bowl Free Program)
- Bicycle shops
- Goodwill
- Project Lemonade
- CASA or Foster Care Clothing Closets
**National Foster Parent Association**

The NFPA is a respected national voice for foster, kinship, and adoptive families. Their website is an invaluable resource for foster parents as it features an extensive list of links to information on kinship care and fostering children with special needs. This site also presents information related to foster parent training, book recommendations, scholarship opportunities for foster children, and more. http://nfpaonline.org/

**FosterParenting.com**

Fosterparenting.com is a simple yet insightful website that focuses on helping foster parents and children. This site includes articles and blogs that answer a variety of questions about what it is like to be a foster parent. www.fosterparenting.com

**Creating a Family**

This website includes resource guides for the entire foster care process with informative topics such as blending biological and foster children, the effects of prenatal exposure, and understanding loss. Also included are guides to manage children’s difficult behaviors, food and sleep issues, and self-care. Best of all, these resource guides include content in the form of radio shows, blogs, factsheets, videos, and Q&A’s with experts. www.creatingafamily.org

**FosterClub**

FosterClub is dedicated to providing a peer support network for children and youth in foster care. This organization offers training and networking opportunities for both foster children and foster parents. This resource came recommended by a local Oregon foster parent. www.fosterclub.com

**Most Common Types of Foster Placements**

- **46%** non-relative foster home
- **32%** relative foster home

*Source: 2018 AFCARS Report*

**Parenting Educators Working with Foster Parents**

**Child Welfare Information Gateway**

The Child Welfare Information Gateway connects professionals to comprehensive information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families. The Gateway features the latest on topics from prevention to permanency, including child abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption. Search Publications by the topic “Out of Home Care” to find out more. www.childwelfare.gov

**Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard**

To support normalcy in foster children’s lives, foster parents must provide children in their care opportunities for participation in extracurricular, enrichment, and cultural and social activities that are a normal part of childhood and adolescence. Foster parents are asked to apply the reasonable and prudent parenting standard when making decisions regarding a child’s participation in such activities. As a parenting educator, it might be helpful to be aware of what this standard entails. For more information, search “prudent parenting” at www.Oregon.gov/dhs
Considerations for Working with Foster Families

Foster families have many of the same parenting needs as any other family you serve, but there are also special considerations that you might find helpful to think about.

Foster parents may:

- **Be parenting their own biological or adopted children while also parenting foster children**
  - Although foster parents consider all of their children to be a special part of their family regardless of the length of time spent with them, they may have special parenting considerations. For example, parents may have to:
    - Prepare their biological children for a foster or adoptive sibling and navigate sibling conflicts
    - Address the unique needs of foster children, which may make parenting foster children look different from parenting their biological children
    - Manage feelings of grief after a foster child leaves their home.

- **Need guidance and support for parenting children at many different ages and stages**
  - Because children in foster care range from birth to 21 years old, foster parents may benefit from knowledge of child development and parenting “best-practices” across all ages. Resources and parenting classes could include focus on the effects of trauma, the importance of attachment and identity formation, and age-appropriate discipline techniques.
  - Foster parents can base their interactions on children’s developmental needs rather than chronological age. If a child comes from a history of abuse or neglect, he or she might need more support than other children in the same age group. Regardless of a foster child’s age, allowing that child to learn at their own pace is crucial. Let progress be guided by each foster child's readiness to move on to the next developmental level.

- **Have less time to build a trusting relationship/secure attachment with their child than other families**
  - A secure emotional bond between children and caregivers is critical for healthy development, including a child’s ability to form trusting relationships and to exhibit positive behaviors. To nurture a secure relationship, foster parents can:
    - be consistently available and maintain family routines, which builds feelings of trust and safety
    - be supportive and empathetic, helping children through upset feelings
    - be encouraging, which includes involvement and interest in children’s activities
  - Another important way foster parents can build trust and belonging is by providing sensory comfort and familiarity. For example, foster parents can learn how to cook their foster child’s favorite meals and provide regular routines around mealtime, naps, and bedtime.

- **Benefit from knowledge of trauma and adverse childhood experiences as well as knowledge of what it means to experience secondary trauma through the experiences of their children**
  - Trauma and adverse childhood experiences can have long-term effects on children’s brains, bodies, behavior, and ways of feeling and thinking. Foster parents can help their children by identifying trauma triggers (e.g., recognizing that certain memories or experiences might lead them to think about past traumatic experiences), being emotionally and physically available, and remaining calm.
  - It is important that foster parents avoid retraumatization, which occurs when children have experiences that remind them of a past trauma, leading them to feel like they are experiencing a traumatic event again. Being mindful of children’s triggers will enable foster parents to avoid retraumatization.
  - When secondary trauma occurs, foster parents can focus on the need to heal their own trauma, and seek support from friends, family, and professionals.

- **Appreciate a “warm hand-off” to resources and organizations in the community that offer support for foster families (e.g., early intervention)**
  - There are many resources and organizations available to help foster families, such as those listed in this guide. Remaining knowledgeable about how your community is supporting foster families will enable you to better connect families with the resources and supports they may find beneficial.
Foster parents may:

• Seek strategies that provide immediate support related to managing challenging emotions or behaviors
  o Foster families may need support with a wide range of challenging emotions and behaviors. Parenting classes that focus on recognizing and managing children’s emotions, positive discipline strategies, and the importance of family rules and routines may be especially helpful. Parenting classes can provide the opportunity to connect with other parents and foster parents in the community, which can help foster families feel less alone in their parenting journey and recognize that the joys and struggles their family experiences are normal. Providing a regular way to connect with other parents and experienced parenting educators can help foster families build their toolbox of parenting strategies to better help them understand the needs their child has, the skills their child may need support learning, and encourage them to address challenges they experience at home with understanding and compassion.

• Not know their children’s full history
  o Every foster child has a story; they may have been neglected, abused, or sent from one home to another. Foster parents learn what they are able to about children’s medical, genetic, and background information to support each child’s developmental, emotional, and medical needs.
  o If critical information is unknown, foster parents can allow children to share at their own discretion without feeling pressured to do so. Foster parents can practice positive parenting techniques appropriate for children who have experienced trauma, including recognizing that they can love and support their children even without knowing or understanding their background.

• Attend parenting classes with or without children in their care
  o Foster parents may experience gaps between placements; however, it is important to include and encourage foster parents to seek ongoing parenting education to help them feel prepared for their next placement.

• Experience significant grief as they welcome children into their families and then say good-bye
  o Foster parents may need support for loss and grief. This may come from participating in parenting groups and building connections with others who understand what they are experiencing, as well as through engaging in formal therapy sessions or informal foster parent support groups. Foster parents may also want to take time in between placements.

• Benefit from self-care practices
  o In order to effectively care for foster children and minimize feelings of stress and burnout, foster parents can focus energy on taking care of themselves. Foster parents can practice healthy stress management strategies including talking about their feelings with others, taking deep breaths, making healthy eating choices, exercising, getting enough sleep, participating in hobbies, connecting with family and friends, participating in parenting classes, and finding support in local community groups and fellow parents and foster parents.

Suggested resources:


For additional information, contact:
Nicole Mullican, M.S.
PhD Student in Human Development & Family Studies
Oregon State University
mullicak@oregonstate.edu