

Engaging and supporting foster families

Michael Maurer

Department of Child Safety

- PLEASE NOTE: This presentation is NOT complete. Handouts for the completed presentation will be provided at the conference by the presenter.
- Any questions or comments, please contact Michael Maurer at Mmaurer@azdes.gov
- THANK YOU!!!!!!

Objectives

- Dispel myths about fostering and provide education on what foster parents should expect, with a focus on foster families involvement with DCS, DCS workers, and licensing agencies.
- Discuss strategies to engage, support and empower our foster families to be successful and prevent burnout. Present resources for foster families.
- Present current research topics on the effects of foster care on children and how foster families can provide a better living environment for the children in their care.

How we will accomplish this...

1. Educate ourselves about foster families and the effects of foster care on children
2. Discuss qualities of good foster families
3. Provide examples of things foster families should expect and how to prepare them to deal with those situations
4. Examine how to support foster families with resources in our communities
5. Present best practice tools for foster families to use in the home
6. Teach foster families to be advocates for themselves and their foster children

Did you know?

- There are over 19,000 children in foster care in Arizona and not enough foster families in Arizona. This means many children have to reside in congregate care, in places such as group homes, shelters, or other congregate care facilities. While these facilities do provide safety and all the basic necessities of the life for the children in their care, they cannot provide a home environment like that found in a true foster home. Thus, it is extremely important that we find ways to reduce the turnover of foster families in Arizona and ensure that new and current foster families are as best prepared and equipped to care for foster children as we can make them. This will ensure that the time these children spend in foster care will be the best it can be.

Greg McKay and Rick D'Amico on Fox10

- <https://dcs.az.gov/foster-care>

Myths about Foster Care

- Myth: Most children in foster care have had dozens of placements.
 - Reality: The average number of placements for a foster child is around 3.
- Myth: The racial background of most children in foster care is _____.
 - Reality: Children in foster care are racially and ethnically diverse. According to the most recent national data, approximately 42% of children in foster care are White, 26% are Black, 21% are Hispanic, 6% are multiracial, 2% are American Indian and 1% are Asian. In Arizona, approximately 40% of children in foster care are White, 5% are Black, 43% are Hispanic, 3% are multiracial, 6% are American Indian and 3% are Asian

Myths and Misconceptions about Foster Care

- Myth: Most children in foster care are teenagers.
 - Reality: The median age of children in foster care is 8, and almost 50% of children in foster care are over the age of 10. An estimated 70% of children in foster care have siblings in foster care. A 2008 federal law gave States the ability to extend foster care for youth up to the age of 21.
- Myth: I have no control over which children I'm asked to foster.
 - Reality: You can't choose the specific children you foster, but you can specify the age and gender you prefer. Families for children and youth between the ages of 11 and 16, sibling groups and teen moms are currently in the greatest need. Also, kinship foster families can choose to only foster relative children.

Myths and Misconceptions about Foster Care

- Myth: Each foster child has to have a room of their own.
 - Reality: Each child needs to have a bed of their own, not a room of their own. In addition, children of the opposite sex may share a room if they are under an age specified by the State (usually around 6 years old). In some instances, however, there may be child-to-square feet requirements or behavioral concerns that will prevent children from being able to share a room.
- Myth: I can't foster if I have a full-time job outside of the home.
 - Reality: You don't have to be a stay at home parent to foster. If the foster child requires daycare, however, you may be responsible for covering that expense. (DCS in Arizona does provide for daycare, but it may still require a co-pay.)

Myths and Misconceptions about Foster Care

- Myth: All children in foster care have special needs and require special education.
 - Reality: Many children in foster care are regular children who unfortunately had to be removed from their families due to abuse or neglect. Special needs can simply refer to a factor or condition that makes a child eligible for assistance (such as being older, being part of a sibling group, being from a particular racial or ethnic background, medical conditions, or physical, mental, or emotional handicaps). A child with special needs shouldn't be confused with a child who requires special education.
- Myth: I'm not allowed to adopt children I foster.
 - Reality: While slightly more than half of all children who enter foster care return to their birth families, there are still thousands of children who cannot return home. Of the 51,000 children in foster care adopted last year, 54% were adopted by their foster parents.

Myths and Misconceptions about Foster Care

- Myth: Fostering a child who's been removed from the care of their birth parents is dangerous.
 - Reality: Foster parents receive a reimbursement to cover the cost of food and clothing, and medical, dental, and counseling services are covered by Medicaid. Stated agencies will also provide supportive services such as training and respite care. With foster care placements, most children will have regular, court-ordered visits with their birth parents. This is an important part of the reunification process and foster parents play an important role by working with the child's case manager to decide the location and time of the visits. The court decides whether the visits will be supervised, however discretion with visitation may be left up to DCS.

Foster Families: Who are they?

- Licensed Foster Parents
 - Licensed foster parents work with an agency in their community who helps them with the process of becoming licensed and provides them with support throughout the time as foster parents.
 - Licensed foster parents are assigned a case manager from their licensing agency who is responsible for working with the family.
 - Licensed foster parents are often non-relative placements, however many relatives who become placements for relative children do become licensed in order to tap into the additional resources and support provided to licensed foster parent's.

Foster Families: Who are they?

- Licensed Foster Parents
 - Licensed foster parents have regular home visits from their licensing case manager to ensure that they are providing appropriate care for their foster children and have the necessary support to do so.
 - Licensed foster parents are able to receive more state and federal funding to help them provide for their foster children.
 - Licensed foster parents often have many non-relative children in their care during their time as foster parents. This means that they need additional training in working with children of different backgrounds and with children who have experienced trauma.

Foster Families: Who are they?

- Unlicensed Foster Parents:
 - Unlicensed foster parents are kinship placements who have not gone through or not completed the licensing process. Kinship placements are relatives and non-relatives that have a significant relationship to the child.
 - Unlicensed foster parents will undergo a criminal background check and home check upon initial DCS placement and go through a home study at a later date.

Foster Families: Who are they?

- Unlicensed Foster Parents:
 - Unlicensed foster parents often become foster parents after a DCS removal. They do not have the training of licensed foster parents and often do not understand the full responsibilities of being a foster parent.
 - Unlicensed foster parents can choose to go through the licensing process, but some do not. Licensing is not mandatory for a child to be placed in the home.
 - Currently 4600 Kinship foster homes in Arizona.

Effects of Foster Care on Children

- Overall children are less successful when placed in foster care than children in the general population, but differences can be made in the care given in foster care to improve their success.
- Foster care creates a disruption in the caregiving of children who have experienced abuse or neglect, often leading to further problems, however foster care is also clearly necessary to protect children from further abuse and neglect.
- Research has shown that foster children have higher rates of psychological and behavioral problems and special needs than the general population.

Effects of Foster Care on Children

- Foster children are found to commonly have poor social functioning and emotional difficulties that are often considered to be a result of multiple placements during longer term stays in care.
- Children who have experienced rejecting or insensitive care frequently come to expect parental unavailability, and are likely to develop behavior patterns that have long-term negative consequences for socioemotional development.

Effects of Foster Care on Children

- Young children placed in foster care, particularly infants and toddlers, who experience extended caregiver-child separation have greater potential for difficulty adjusting to surrogate caregivers and the foster home environment.
- Younger children are often more likely to be placed in foster care and spend a larger proportion of their life in out-of-home care.
- Out-of-home placement is typically associated with disruptions in attachment relationships and this can be especially true for younger children.

Effects of Foster Care on Children

- Research shows that behavioral problems in foster children tend to rise after leaving foster care and these behavioral problems appeared to be more significant when children leave unfamiliar care (non-relative/kin foster placement) versus those in familiar care (relative/kin foster placement). This suggests that familiar care with relatives or familiar figures leads to an situation that requires less significant changes in the caregiving routine, leading to less disruption in child development which lead to behavioral problems.

Licensing Process

- <https://dcs.az.gov/services/foster-care-and-adoption/steps-becoming-foster-parent>

PS-MAPP Training

Qualities of Good Foster Parents

- Openness to agency involvement and desires to have a strong and appropriate relationship with agency staff.
- The ability and willingness to learn about the special needs of children in foster care.
- A strong social support system.
- Tenderness and genuine concern for children who are in need of foster care.
- Tolerance to deal with ambivalent feelings from others
- The ability to let go and not be in control.

Qualities of Good Foster Parents

- Flexibility of expectations about the process and others.
- Ability to meet own needs, tolerate rejection, and accept delay in gratification as a parent.
- Flexibility in the family roles and using resources.
- A sense of humor.
- Empathy for the child and their birth parent's situation that lead to the child being placed in foster care
- Understanding of children's emotional issues after being placed in foster care.

Qualities of Good Foster Parents

- Support of the child and biological family with the understanding that reunification may occur in the future.
- Transparency and consistency with expectations of the child.
- An ability to acknowledge and appreciate small steps towards goals for the child.
- Understanding that building a relationship with these children can take time, as it can be difficult for them to learn to trust an adult again.
- The ability to seek and accept help.

What to Expect as a Foster Parent

Foster Parent's duties/responsibilities

- Medical Care and Appointments
- Therapy and other Services
- CFTs and other case meeting
- Coordination of child's school, activities, and services
- Transportation
- Basic Necessities – clothing, food, home, etc.

Having workers in the home on a regular basis

- Service Providers
- Licensing
- DCS
- Lawyers

DCS investigations of Foster Homes

- What to Expect
- Process of investigation
- Timeframe of Investigation
- RESEARCH ARTICLE: Child Abuse in Foster Care

How to Engage Foster Parents

- Start by educating yourself with what it means to be a foster parent
- Acknowledge their contribution and sacrifice for foster children

Empower Foster Parents to:

- Provide a better living environment for foster children
- Advocate for Foster Children
- Minimize Negative Effects of Foster Care
- Trauma Informed Care
 - How understanding of trauma inflicted on children who enter foster care makes better foster parents

Best Practices for Foster Families

- Documentation of child in home and key incidents
- Communication with Licensing/DCS/Service Providers

Support/Resources

- Licensed Foster Families
- State and Federal Benefits

Support/Resources

- Unlicensed Foster Families / Guardians
 - KARE center
 - How KARE works
 - Referral process
 - Navigators: how they help you

Support/Resources

- Care Portal
 - Referral process – how it works and how it can help

Support/Resources

- CMDP
- Day Care
- AZFAP <http://azafap.org/>
- <http://fostercaresupportaz.com/>
- <http://www.aask-az.org/index.php>
- <https://students.asu.edu/arizona-foster-youth-programs>