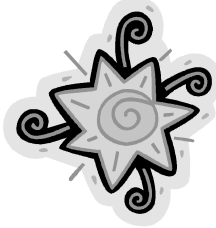




Fostering Across Wisconsin

*A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center
in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services*

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Diversity Matters

In this issue of Fostering Across Wisconsin, we have included information about diversity to encourage you to think about and explore ways to continually recognize, learn about, and appreciate the youth in your home. Even if a foster home may seem similar to the cultural or ethnic background of a child's family, it is going to be an adjustment from the youth's way of living. Youth in foster care will need some time to adjust to their new and different environment.

Here are some questions to help you think about how culture impacts your life and youth in foster care:

- How do you define yourself? What is your ethnic or cultural background?
- What is the culture inside and outside of your home?
- How do you and your family celebrate who you are (culture, ethnicity, national origin, religion)?
- Do you value and embrace people who are different than you?
- How would you go about learning more about a youth's culture or traditions?
- How would you feel if someone didn't acknowledge who you are?

Multicultural awareness consists of accepting an individual's cultural values, traditions, beliefs, customs, rules of behavior, food preferences, language rituals, art, technology, styles of dress, religious beliefs, spirituality, sexual orientation, and political and economic systems. Everyone deserves to have their cultural heritage honored, celebrated, and cherished. As a foster or adoptive parent you have an obligation to acknowledge, encourage, and promote the identities of the children who are in your care.

Casey Family Services has an excellent video called "Knowing Who You Are" in which youth in foster care talk about how it felt to have foster families embrace or ignore their culture. To request a copy of this video, please contact the Resource Center at 1-800-947-8074 or <http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org>

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Hair & Skin Care Considerations

Appearance is important to all of us, including foster children. If you are a foster parent who is caring for children of a different ethnicity, hair and skin care practices may be quite different from your own. Using hair care products that are inappropriate or washing a child's hair daily could damage his or her hair; cutting another child's hair may be insulting to that child or family. Consulting with a child's immediate and extended family members for advice regarding hair and skin care techniques is the best way to gain specific knowledge about caring for a child's hair and skin. Not only does this give you good information regarding the child placed in your home, but it is an easy way to build a relationship with the child's family.

If you are unable to get information from family members, you will need to research hairstylists and salons in your area that have the necessary experience and expertise in cutting and styling hair. The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center has some material that may help, and the following is a link to a hair care handbook put together by the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program: <http://www.dollslikeme.com/haircare.pdf>

Helping Youth Preserve Their Race and Ethnic Identity

A young person's identity is directly linked to his or her cultural and ethnic heritage. One of the ways in which you can support a youth learning about and embracing his or her cultural identity is by celebrating and educating yourself about holidays, traditions, religious or spiritual beliefs, and customs of other traditions. You and your family can also attend community-sponsored cultural events, such as ethnic fairs, art and music festivals, tribal pow wows, and other cultural celebrations and events that occur in Wisconsin.

Here are some helpful web links:

North American Council on Adoptable Children at: <http://www.nacac.org/postadopt/transracial.html>

Ethnic Festivals in Wisconsin; Wisconsin Department of Tourism: <http://agency.travelwisconsin.com> and then click on the Arts and Culture link on the left-hand side.

Great Lakes Intertribal Council: <http://www.glitc.org> which includes links to individual tribes in Wisconsin.

Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA), Representing the Multiracial, Multiethnic, and Transracial Adoption Community: <http://www.ameasite.org/global.asp>

Wisconsin Childcare Improvement Project, Inc.; Cultural Sensitivity When Caring for Infants & Toddlers: http://www.wccip.org/tips/infant_toddler/cultural_sensitive_info.html

These are just a few of the resources available. Visit the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center web site at <http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org> for more information.

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth

One of the more complex topics regarding diversity surrounds sexuality and sexual orientation. For teens dealing with same-sex attractions or facing questions about gender identity, the topic of sexual development can become more complex and emotionally charged.

It is important for you as a foster or adoptive parent to talk openly with your licensing agency about how your views and beliefs could affect youth who may be placed in your home. This is particularly important because if you foster teens, you will eventually care for a teen who questions his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center has information and resources that can be helpful for foster families and provide more information about LGBTQ youth. You can also find more information about the Alliance for LGBT Youth sponsored by Children's Services Society of Wisconsin at the following link:

<http://www.chw.org/display/PPF/DocID/35803/Nav/1/router.asp> CSSW is also sponsoring a summit to discuss the needs of LGBT youth in out-of-home care on Friday, September 28th in Portage. Contact Jane Ottow at (414) 453-1400 or Jane.Ottow@cssw.org for more information.

Some additional web links and resources include:

Breaking the Silence: An excellent (and FREE) DVD specifically addressing LGBTQ youth in foster care. Offered by the National Center for Lesbian Rights at <http://www.nclrights.org/publications/breakingthesilence.htm>

Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG)
<http://www.pflag.org/>

Child Welfare League of America
<http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbqtq.htm>

Religion & Spirituality

Diversity also includes respecting and valuing the child's and his or her family's spiritual and religious beliefs.

Here are some important points to remember:

- The child's parents have the right to express which religion, spirituality, or related activities in which they prefer their child to participate.
- The child can choose the religious or spiritual activities in which he or she wants to participate.
- Your foster care coordinator can help negotiate any challenges related to differing spiritual and religious practice among your family, the child, and his or her family, if there are any.
- Your religion may be an important part of your family life and you can invite a child to participate, but you should never impose your beliefs or religious practices on the child you foster.
- Your respect for the religious beliefs of the child and his or her family demonstrates acceptance and tolerance of who they are.

For more information about requirements regarding religious activities for a child who is fostered, refer to s. HFS 56.09(1)(g) in foster home licensing standards.



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Focus on 56 – Nondiscrimination

Sometimes people interested in foster care think that they can't be foster parents because they practice a certain religion, define themselves as gay or lesbian, or aren't the right age. According to s. HFS 56.04(6), Adm. Code, agencies are not allowed to discriminate against applicants or foster parents on the basis of age, sex, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, national origin, or handicap. This means that an agency cannot deny someone a license or treat them differently due to any of the criteria listed above. An agency's decision about an applicant's license must be based upon the individual's ability to provide safe and appropriate care for children in foster care.

Licensing standards also apply that same requirement on foster parents. Foster parents, according to s. HFS 56.09(1)(e), Adm. Code, are not allowed to discriminate against a child due to the child's race or cultural identification, sex, age, sexual orientation, color, creed, ancestry, national origin, or disability. Children in foster care need to be supported and affirmed about who they are, especially because they have been removed from the families who play such an important role in developing their identities.

If you have a concern about your ability to support a child in foster care in their expression or identification of who they are, talk to your foster care coordinator. You can also contact the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center to find out more about the topics listed in this newsletter.

Foster Parent Support Resources in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) works hard to support and advocate for the needs of foster and adoptive families by operating a website with information about the creation of local chapters, publishing a quarterly newsletter, hosting two conferences every year, and working across the state on behalf of issues that are important to foster parents and foster children.

To find out more about WFAPA, visit their website at www.wfapa.org. For more information about other support groups, associations, and resources available in Wisconsin, contact us at 1-800-947-8074. We can provide you with information about the resources closest to you.

****SAVE THE DATE****

WFAPA's next conference will be October 19-21, 2007 at the Waters in Minocqua, WI

Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

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