

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Learn more at:

www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth/

#ChildAbusePreventionMonth

#KeepingKidsSafe

#ThrivingFamilies



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Dear Families, Are You Able to Stretch?

Dear Foster Families,

As we continue our mission to provide loving and supportive homes for children and youth in need, we want to highlight an urgent need within our foster care community. Currently, there are older youth who are in desperate need of stable and caring environments, yet they remain without placements, spending nights in offices instead of homes.

We understand that many foster families may have preferences or concerns about fostering older youth. However, we urge you to consider stretching your age range and opening your hearts and homes to these deserving young individuals.

Older youth in foster care face unique challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood. They often lack the stability and support systems needed to thrive independently.

By welcoming older youth into your homes, you have the opportunity

to make a profound difference in their lives, providing them with the love, guidance and stability they need to succeed.

While fostering older youth may come with its own set of challenges, it also offers numerous rewards. You have the chance to build meaningful relationships, mentorship opportunities, and create lasting memories with a young person who may have never experienced the warmth and security of a loving family environment.

By expanding your age range and considering fostering older youth, you are not only changing the trajectory of their lives, but also enriching your own family experience. Together, we can ensure that no child or youth spends a night without the comfort of a safe and nurturing home.

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Dear Families, Are You Able to Stretch? cont. ...

If you have any questions or would like more information about fostering older youth, please do not hesitate to reach out to your licensing worker. Your willingness to open your hearts and homes to older youth is truly appreciated and makes a world of difference.

Thank you for your continued dedication to providing love and support to children and youth in foster care.

~The Saint Louis Partners Team

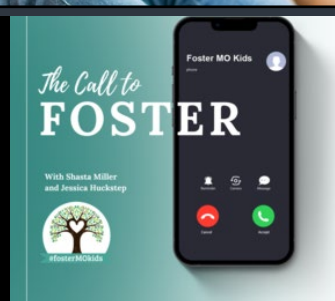


More on the Call to Foster Podcast

S2 E4

"If they go home and you're not a little sad, you didn't do your job."

Listen along as Jessica and Shasta talk with Jason Seter, a foster parent and co-trainer in Missouri for over 10 years. Jason admits that they started fostering to adopt, but then quickly fell in love with fostering and realized the great need for foster homes. Having cared for children from one day old to fifteen years old, he has found that each child is unique and different. Jason also discusses the reality that some families "get it together" after their children have been adopted to someone else and the opportunities he has had to help his children foster their relationships with their biological families - even after they are his adopted children. **Listen here:** <https://thecalltofofoster.transistor.fm/episodes/if-they-go-home-and-youre-not-a-little-sad-you-didnt-do-your-job>



The Call to Foster Podcast: S2 E2

"It's gonna be the most amazing thing you ever do."

Shasta, Jessica and Ashton talk with an impressive foster parent, Ali Keck, who is 25 years old! After only 3 months of foster parenting, Ali has a lot of practical advice and experience to share with young, new or even seasoned foster parents. She addresses how foster parenting fits in when it comes to her personal life - her passion truly shines through.

Listen here:

<https://thecalltofofoster.transistor.fm/episodes/its-gonna-be-the-most-amazing-thing-you-ever-do>

Empowering Families: The Protective Factors Approach

It is important to recognize that April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During this time, our focus shifts towards protective factors approach to empower families.

In the past, our efforts mainly revolved around mitigating risk factors within families. However, this often led to stigma and insufficient support. Now, we are shifting towards emphasizing strengths and providing necessary resources to enable families to thrive and build resilience.

The protective factors approach considers various influences on a child's life, from individual characteristics to societal norms.

By fostering community support systems and promoting positive

relationships, we create environments conducive to children's well-being. Equipping parents and caregivers with stress management techniques, problem-solving skills, and hopefulness further strengthens families' ability to navigate challenges.

Equipping parents and caregivers strengthens families' ability to navigate challenges and thrive.

Through collaborative efforts at all levels, including policy-making and grassroots initiatives, we prioritize protective factors that foster safe and nurturing environments for children.

As we observe Child Abuse Prevention Month, it is important to acknowledge the role of all individuals, including foster parents, in supporting this approach and ensuring the well-being of children.

If you would like to learn more about the National Child Abuse Prevention Month Campaign, please visit www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth.

Another resource is <https://preventchildabuse.org/capmonth2024/>.

Also see information on the *Prevention Resource Guide* in the red box to the right.



2023 / 2024 *Prevention Resource Guide*

www.childwelfare.gov/resources/20232024-prevention-resource-guide/

There are actions we can take within communities, organization and families to address root causes of child abuse and neglect. This guide highlights the innovative ways that communities are doing prevention work to help children and families thrive. The protective factors have always been central to the *Prevention Resource Guide*. A protective factors approach focuses on positive ways to engage families by emphasizing

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Self-Care Corner

As foster parents, our primary focus is often on providing love and support to the children in our care. However, it is essential to remember that taking care of ourselves is just as important as caring for others. Self-care is not selfish; it is a necessary component of maintaining our well-being and resilience in the face of the challenges that come with fostering.

Creating a self-care plan is an empowering step towards prioritizing our own needs and ensuring we have the support systems in place to thrive. Here are some strategies to consider when developing your self-care plan:

1. Identify Your Needs: Take some time to reflect on what activities and practices bring you joy, relaxation and rejuvenation. Whether it is spending time with friends, pursuing hobbies or simply taking a quiet moment for yourself, knowing what helps you recharge is the first step towards self-care.

2. Build Your Support Network: Foster parenting can be both rewarding and


demanding, and having a strong support system in place is essential. Reach out to friends, family members, fellow foster parents or support groups for encouragement, advice and understanding. Surrounding yourself with people who uplift and validate your experiences can make all the difference.

3. Set Boundaries: Establishing boundaries is crucial for maintaining balance and preventing burnout. Learn to recognize when you need to say no to additional responsibilities or commitments and prioritize your own well-being. Remember it is okay to ask for help when you need it and delegate tasks when necessary.

4. Practice Self-Compassion: Be kind to yourself. Acknowledge that you are doing the best you can in challenging circumstances. Give yourself permission to take breaks, make mistakes and prioritize self-care without feeling guilty. Remember that self-compassion is not a luxury; it is a fundamental aspect of resilience and well-being.

5. Schedule Regular Self-Care Activities: Incorporate self-care activities into your daily or weekly routine. Whether it is scheduling time for exercise, meditation, reading or enjoying a favorite hobby, making self-care a priority ensures that you are consistently nurturing your physical, emotional and mental health.

6. Take Advantage of Respite Care: Utilize respite care services to give yourself much-needed breaks and time for self-care. Respite care allows you to recharge and rejuvenate while ensuring that your foster children are in safe and supportive environments. Do not hesitate to reach out to your agency or support network to explore respite care options available to you.

7. Seek Professional Support: If you are feeling overwhelmed or struggling to cope with the demands of foster parenting, do not hesitate to seek professional support. Therapists, counselors or support groups specializing in foster care can provide valuable guidance, validation and coping 

Self-Care cont.

strategies to help you more effectively navigate challenges.

Self-care is an ongoing process, and your self-care plan may evolve over time as your needs and circumstances change. By prioritizing your own well-being and creating a support system that nurtures and sustains you, you will be better equipped to provide the love, stability, and care that foster children need to thrive. If you would like support in coming up with these solutions, please reach out to your licensing worker!

2023 / 2024 Prevention Resource Guide cont. ...

their strengths, in addition to identifying areas where they have room to grow with support. Focusing on protective factors helps children, youth, and families build resilience and contributes to positive outcomes.
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/20232024-prevention-resource-guide/>



Building Bonds: Connecting with Your Foster Placement

Creating a welcoming environment is crucial for foster children to feel at home.

Providing a private space and involving them in personalizing it fosters a sense of belonging and security from the start.

1. Incorporating the foster child into daily decision-making processes validates their opinions and promotes inclusion. This involvement helps older children develop critical thinking skills and contributes to their overall development.
2. Establishing routines and boundaries provides a sense of security and structure.

Clear rules that are communicated with compassion help foster children understand boundaries and feel safe.

3. Offering reassurance and support is essential for building trust, especially during challenging times. Positive reinforcement demonstrates care and acceptance, reassuring foster children of their place within the family.
4. Initiating conversations based on their interests helps build rapport and understanding. Spending quality time together promotes a sense of belonging and togetherness.

5. Using inclusive language and allowing the foster child to choose what to call you reinforces their sense of ownership within the family unit.

6. Building trust takes time and patience. Understanding their needs and experiences and providing support accordingly fosters a sense of safety and security.

7. Being a positive emotional role model and encouraging healthy expressions of emotions help foster children develop coping mechanisms and emotional resilience.

8. Approaching physical contact with sensitivity and respect for their boundaries is crucial. Seeking guidance ensures interactions are appropriate and consensual.

9. Above all, patience and understanding are key. Recognizing their unique backgrounds and experiences fosters a nurturing environment where foster children can thrive.

We would love to hear from you all. Please respond on our Facebook page with ways you work to bond with the children placed in your home!

[facebook.com/SaintLouisPartners](https://www.facebook.com/SaintLouisPartners)

Meet Saint Louis Partners Director:

Jennifer McKenzie,
MSW



A FORCE FOR FAMILIES.

Hello! My name is Jennifer McKenzie and on November 1, 2023, I started my employment with Good Shepherd as the Director of St. Louis Partners. I come to the Partnership with 30+ years of child welfare experience, which includes 28 years with the Children's Division and time as the Director of Foster Care with another contracted agency in the St. Louis area.

Over the last several months, I have enjoyed the many opportunities to get to know the staff in each of the partner agencies as well as speak to some of you.

While child welfare is a forever changing system and comes with many challenges, I appreciate how each of you have endured the changes and continue to support the children and families we work with every day.

Many of our youth are now coming to us with very complicated and complex trauma / behaviors that have made finding placements more challenging. However, I am continually impressed by your willingness to take these youth into your home when we often have nowhere else to go. THANK YOU!!!

If there is one thing I understand, it is the unique responsibility of caring for the children that you accept into your homes.

When I was growing up, my parents fostered many children and took youth with very high needs. While it was rewarding, I remember how emotionally exhausted my parents would feel and

questioning whether they could keep doing what seemed to be a thankless job. Maybe you have felt this way or are even feeling this way now, but I would like to encourage you and let you know that what you are doing does matter. The seeds of kindness, love and attention that you show to a child or even a parent will grow over time, and they will remember you.

I am so thankful for each of you who foster and adopt. You are part of an amazing partnership, and we could not do what we do without you.

Thank you,
Jennifer McKenzie, MSW
Director of Saint Louis Partners
jmckenzie@gsstl.org

Protective Effects of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

Research is exploring the ways PCEs like supportive environments and strong relationships with family and peers help promote healthy child development and build resilience to adversity. Examples are:

- ~ Feeling able to talk to family members about feelings
- ~ Feeling family stood by them during difficult times
- ~ Enjoying participating in community traditions
- ~ Feeling a sense of belonging in high school
- ~ Feeling supported by friends
- ~ Having two+ nonparent adults who took genuine interest in them and
- ~ Feeling safe/protected by an adult in their home.



Interested in Adoption, Foster Care or Mentoring?

We would love to hear from you! We always have kids in need of a loving home and mentors to provide support. To learn more, call Saint Louis Partners 314-938-5690.

Upcoming Events:

For all the great events offered by our partners, check out the links below!

- **Bringing Families Together**
BringingFamiliesTogether.com – coming soon!
facebook.com/BringingFamiliesTogetherSTL/events
- **Good Shepherd Children & Family Services**
goodshepherdstl.org/event-landing-page/
facebook.com/goodshepherdstl/events/
- **Lutheran Family & Children's Services of Missouri**
lfcsmo.org/about/events/
facebook.com/LFCSMO/events

Saint Louis Partners April 2024

Saint Louis Partners

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www.saintlouispartners.org



All agencies are accredited by
Council on Accreditation

For nearly eighteen years, Saint Louis PARTNERS (Permanency: Achieving Results Through Networking, Education, Resources and Services) has been investing in the strength and stability of family through compassionate, comprehensive foster care and adoptive services. Our primary goal for each child is to create a bridge home to permanence, anchoring a child in the rich and trusted love of family.

Our primary partner in this effort is you, the foster parent.

Saint Louis PARTNERS unites a partnership of three strong agencies:

